

Assimilation and Hip-Hop

Interethnic Relations and the Americanization of New Immigrants in Hip-Hop Culture

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It would not be hip-hop without a lot of shout-outs. So...

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Let's get it!

Hip-hop heartbreaks / Straight-laced, deep bass, 808s plus the mixtapes / Got a nigga feeling like I up and left ya / Get away now you all in the lectures / Being studied by the college's professors / Now I regret the day I met ya. – Scarface.

Preface

They tell me I'm a dreamer, they ridicule / They feel defeated, old, bitter, and cynical / Excuse me but I see it from a different view / I still believe in what a driven few could really do. - Brother Ali (2012: "Letter to My Countrymen").

Some years ago, the hip-hop journalist collective *ego trip* announced that they were working on the ultimate book on white rappers. I thought long and hard about requesting to write a chapter on Nordic rappers. As a middleclass white hip-hop writer from a very white country, this should be somewhat an expertise of mine. Fortunately, I never sent the request. In 2013, the book project has been canceled a long time ago, while I am writing a thesis on African Americans and interethnic relations in multiethnic inner-city neighborhoods.¹ It is fair to raise the objection that I am writing on a subject that I am not really qualified to discuss.

But still I choose to take on this particular topic, and this is why: My primary academic fields of interest have been ethnicity studies and hip-hop studies, and the contributors in these two fields are coming to dissimilar conclusions in terms of African Americans' position in society, interaction between African Americans and other ethnic minorities, and the color line's relevance and position in the United States. Different conclusions are expected, because even though constructed ideas like the color line, racial "otherness," racial "inbetweenness," and blackness exist in both hip-hop culture and in the greater society, the way they are perceived, understood and lived by differs fundamentally in hip-hop and mainstream society. Associate professors of American Studies Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Melnick write that immigrants have always entered a nation constructed around a black and white dividing line, and that it is inside the frame of this division that immigrant life comes into sharpest focus (Rubin and Melnick, 2007: 4-6). If these assumptions are correct, then an important question will be if the new racial ideas and politics that are present in hip-hop culture are affecting the old racial ideas that historically have been a central part of social relations in the United States (Foner and Fredrickson, 2004: 1-9) (Spickard, 2007: 25).

In relation to the two fields' different ways of thinking, one specific topic struck me as particularly interesting: The role that long-time established ethnic and/or racial groups play as "Americanizers" and role models for newer immigration groups. It was a couple of works on one of the United States' most distinctive ethnic groups that inspired me. In their works on

¹ The book project became, tellingly for our age, a reality show instead (*ego trip's The (White) Rapper Show*. 2007. VHI).

Irish Americans' historical relations with other European immigrant groups, David Roediger and James Barrett illustrated how Irish Americans had a position in certain American cities that made them both guides and gatekeepers for Italian, Polish, Jewish and other European immigrants. They reached this conclusion by analyzing the role of the Irish as Americanizers in settings, such as urban gangs and the boxing scene, that had earlier been scholarly overlooked (Roediger and Barrett, 2004) (Barrett and Roediger, 2005).

Now, in studies on African Americans' historical and contemporary relations with non-European immigrant groups, most scholars conclude that African Americans have a position in urban America that is quite the opposite of the situation that Irish Americans once possessed. While the Irish, according to the findings of Roediger and Barrett, made whiteness and a white panethnicity seem attractive, the position of African Americans and popular ideas of blackness further builds upon, according to most academic works, an attractiveness for new immigrants to be labeled as white or included in a non-black panethnicity (Foner and Fredrickson, 2004: 10-13). I have always found the later of these conclusions to be partly unsatisfying, and this lack of satisfaction created a basis for this thesis.

In the words of one of the new great rappers Kendrick Lamar: "Racism is still alive / Yellow tape and color lines / Fuck that, nigga look at that line / It's so diverse / They getting off work / And they wanna see Kendrick" (2011: "Fuck Your Ethnicity"). For while racism is still very much alive, a time of upheaval has been transparent for a long time in the last decades' most important popular culture. It is therefore necessary to include this aspect into the field of American immigration and ethnicity history. That is what I try to achieve with this thesis.

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1 Introduction

The conflict thesis and the segmented assimilation theory are two of the most significant trends in American immigration and ethnicity studies. The conflict thesis is described by Jon Lie as the idea that conflict and discord characterize interethnic relations in the United States (Lie, 2004: 301-306). While African Americans and other ethnic minorities might live in the same neighborhoods and share the same economic conditions and local political institutions, the conflict thesis states that there is little contact between the different ethnic groups. The relationships that do exist are in addition often filled with tension and hostility.² Segmented assimilation theorists imply that assimilation is a diverse process, and that it is not necessary a positive transition (Alba and Denton, 2004: 257). For while supporters of the theory see the assimilation model as the general American experience, they also argue that there are two distinct cultures into which immigrants may assimilate. Some of them are incorporated into the mainstream middle-class culture, while others less fortunate immigrants assimilate into the culture of native-born minorities (Jaynes, 2004: 111). The later path of assimilation is allegedly followed by a negative development for the assimilated. Integration into African American urban culture is in other words perceived as the same as downward assimilation.³

Both the conflict thesis and the segmented assimilation theory should be critically questioned for their utterly negative frameworks. This thesis is doing so by asking if the experiences and the history of hip-hop culture can counterbalance these two major trends' pessimistic interpretations of interethnic relations. This research question is divided into three sub questions that are asked and answered over an equal number of chapters.

The conflict thesis is questioned in chapter 2 by looking at the high degree of contact between African Americans and Latin Americans in New York City. By comparing and intertwine the interethnic interactions between Irish Americans and other European immigrants with the interethnic relations that can be found in New York's hip-hop scene one can achieve a "then and now"-approach that illustrates several concurrent factors between the

² On the conflict thesis, see Foner and Fredrickson (2004: 10-13), Grenier and Perez (1996: 370-371), Jones-Correa (1998: 32), Rodriguez (1999) and Tatum (1999).

³ On segmented assimilation theory, see Lee (2009: 130-131), Portes and Zhou (1993: 82-83), Rumbaut (1999), Weaver (2010: 17-22) and Zhou and Bankston (1998).

urban powers of Irish Americans in the beginning of the 20th century and the position of African Americans in the beginning of the next century.

The segmented assimilation theory's conception of racism as a built-in characteristic of American society is questioned in chapter 3. Some of the segmented assimilation studies namely work within the outline that a racist culture must and will be handed down from one generation to another (Weaver, 2010: 18-19) (Kitwana, 2005: 132-133). This chapter however illustrate that many young minorities must, through popular and local urban cultures, relate to a set of ideas about race that differs from the ones that have historically dominated mainstream society.

Finally, the segmented assimilation theorists' unilateral perception of assimilation into African American cultures as something very negative is questioned in chapter 4 (Kasinitz, 2004: 286). Does the segmented assimilation theory underestimate the potentials and strengths of the black proletariat's cultures and traditions? This chapter claims so by looking at hip-hop culture's ability to produce counterdominant narratives and engage people in grassroots activism.

Theoretical Framework

James Barrett and David Roediger write that immigrants from South and East Europe could display a grudging respect for Irish power. "Jewish and other boxers often took Irish professional names because of the pugnacious Irish reputation and perhaps also to minimize ethnic discrimination. (...) Italian gangsters in New York and Chicago took on Irish monikers" (Barrett and Roediger, 2005: 9). That many immigrants masked and represented themselves as Irish Americans, as the name-changing phenomenon illustrates, suggests that immigrants modeled their strategies on those of the Irish (Barrett and Roediger, 2005: 9).

The role of an ethnic group as Americanizers might be analyzed in diverse venues. One of them is through construction and interpretation of ethnic and racial identities through popular culture (Barrett and Roediger, 2005: 6) (Rubin and Melnick, 2007: 2). This thesis argues that African Americans play a role as Americanizers for some immigrants, and that this part is similar to the role that Irish Americans once played. While European immigrant groups shared streets and churches with the Irish, new immigrants often share both streets and popular culture with African Americans. The new ethnic minorities encounter daily an urban

culture that very often links blackness with authenticity, success and coolness, and a popular culture that is heavily invested with African American experiences and ideas, myths and imaginations. African Americans have in this respect some of the same social capital that the Irish once had, and this affects interethnic relations and the assimilation process of many first- and second-generation Americans. Consequently, many ethnic minorities imitate African American cultural features, aliases and styles.

We are therefore considering less examined sites for the process of assimilation of contemporary immigrant groups. This is done in the belief that an examination of intergroup relations inside contemporary urban culture could help us reach new insights on the questions of assimilation and interethnic relations. This thesis is consequently not advancing any universal theories, but rather exploring the possibilities for new perspectives, ideas and questions in the field. It makes sense to do this because the current trend in American immigration and ethnic history gives us an overly negative picture of intergroup relations between African Americans and other minorities.

Many leading scholars have indulged in the conflict thesis (Lie, 2004: 301-306). Victoria Hattam writes that all coalitions between African Americans and ethnics have been vulnerable because of “the long history of defining ethnicity against race”, and because economic conditions and political institutions “continue to pit ethnic and racial groups against each other” (Hattam, 2004: 54). José Itzigsohn argues that Dominicans choose the Hispano or Latino label in order to “position themselves in America’s racial classification system as nonblack” (Itzigsohn, 2004: 204). Neil Foley’s analysis of Hispanic identity in Texas also comes to the conclusion that maintaining distance from African Americans is at times the main motivating force behind the Hispanic or Latino panethnicity (Foley, 2004) (Foner and Fredrickson, 2004: 7). James H. Johnson Jr., Walter C. Farrell Jr. and Chandra Guinn use the findings in the *Los Angeles County Social Survey (1992)* and the *Los Angeles Survey of Urban Inequality (1994)* to paint a gloomy picture of intergroup relations in Metropolitan Los Angeles (Johnson Jr., Farrell Jr. and Guinn, 1999).

I personally agree with much of these scholars’ works on interethnic relations, but their studies are in my view also somewhat unbalanced. Take for instance the work of Professor Nestor Rodriguez. He notes both several positive and negative aspects of intergroup relations in urban America, but ignores hip-hop as a meeting ground for intergroup relations in cities like Houston and Los Angeles. Rodriguez treats for example California Proposition 187 as a

source of tension for intergroup relations, but the picture would have been more balanced and accurate if his analysis had included hip-hop culture's multiracial mobilization against the proposition (Rodriguez, 1999: 427-432). Jeff Chang for instance, one of the leading voices in hip-hop studies, sees the protest against Proposition 187 as one of many underlying reasons for the multiethnic nature of hip-hop activism (Chang, 2005: 457).

To be fair, the fields of immigration and ethnicity studies consist of more than scholars indulged with the conflict thesis. Several leading academics have discovered and written about immigrants, especially the second-generation, that assimilate into African American urban culture. Segmented assimilation theorists like Stacey J. Lee, Rubén G. Rumbaut, Alejandro Portes, Min Zhou and Carl Bankston are just some of the names that have studied contemporary urban culture in order to gain insight on the question of Americanization. However, the segmented assimilation theorists too give the readers an overly negative picture of intergroup relations between African Americans and other minorities.

Segmented assimilation theories usually equalize assimilation into African American urban cultures with downward assimilation (Weaver, 2010: 18).⁴ The complaint that immigrants and the children of immigrants are becoming the "wrong kind of Americans" is however nothing new. That the urban environments that surrounded immigrants were responsible for a "cheap Americanism" was a battle cry already heard over 100 years ago (Kasinitz, 2004: 286-287). Philip Kasinitz has criticized segmented assimilation theory on the ground that it is fundamentally pessimistic, writing that the theory sees American culture, at least in its ghetto variant, as "utterly corrosive to one's ability to perform in American society" (Kasinitz, 2004: 286). This writer agrees wholeheartedly with Kasinitz. There is a long history of sharing popular and folk cultures in multiethnic urban neighborhoods, and this history has resulted in some of the most advanced, exciting, influential and viable parts of American culture. To ignore this fact is to distort history, which results, like Raquel Z. Rivera writes, "in the marginalization of some of the richest forms of contemporary urban creative expression" (Rivera, 2003: x).

"Who because of hip-hop now believes, 'I've seen the light, I'm going to save the blacks'", asks hip-hop journalist Elliott Wilson mockingly (Kleinfeld 2000 URL). The question is directed towards himself and others that see hip-hop as the great cultural equalizer. Of course, the culture does not have the power to reverse the color line in the American

⁴ Some of the scholars that equal assimilation into African American urban cultures with downward assimilation are Lee (2009: 130-131), Portes and Zhou (1993: 82-83), Rumbaut (1999) and Zhou and Bankston (1998).

society, but it can modify it. Hip-hop gives minorities a voice, and thereby a means of self-empowerment and access to political power (Strode and Wood, 2008: viii). That is not necessary a horrible acculturation for immigrants.

Ethnic minorities have used hip-hop as a way to insert themselves in the American cultural mainstream ever since DJ Kool Herc, one of the founding fathers of hip-hop culture, and other Caribbean immigrants demonstrated that it was possible for immigrants to use scraps of the dominant culture to make something completely new and hybrid (Rubin and Melnick, 2007: 15). New immigrant cultures are increasingly often a mixture between African American culture and immigrant culture. As Richard D. Alba writes:

New immigration culture does not arise *de novo*, but it is instead a hybrid of cultural materials brought by the immigrants and cultural materials gained in their new country. Assimilation is not without normative aspects, too. Today, assimilationism is often depicted in terms of a demand that minority individuals abandon their native cultures to accept the majority one, a demand that can be viewed as placing them in a position of inferiority and disadvantage (Alba, 1999: 9).

What is it to accept American culture today? What is it to accept American culture in a time when African American culture has become increasingly synonymous with the country's popular culture? And what kind of cultural materials do immigrants gain in the United States? The first motivation behind this thesis is to show that many young Latin, Asian and Arab Americans do not have the all-embracing resistance against association with blackness that certain studies suggest (Foner and Fredrickson, 2004: 6-7). It will instead illustrate that young Americans with immigrant backgrounds often move toward African Americans, and that new immigration cultures are frequently a hybrid of cultural materials brought by the immigrants and materials gained from African Americans.

This is connected with the second motivation behind this thesis, which is to illustrate that assimilation into urban African American culture can have positive effects for young Americans with immigrant background. While this is conflicting with what most segmented assimilation theorists say, there are several reasons to argue that participation in urban African American cultures can be positive for non-African American minorities.

Firstly, hip-hop gives immigrants access to a culture where they can use parts of American culture and combine it with parts of their native traditions, and immigrants are usually able to integrate into hip-hop culture without having to lose their own identities. Assimilation processes rarely offer such a high degree of cultural flexibility. One of the

innovative parts of hip-hop culture were the fact that it made blackness portable. As Darryl Pinckney puts it, hip-hop “told young black men that success could be a kind of militancy and that it did not mean you had to act white or give up any of your yo dog whassup” (Pinckney, 2012: 36). The history of the culture fails so far to give a clear answer to whether it can make other types of identities portable, but in more recent years there have been many examples of young Latin, Arab and Asian Americans that engage in hybrid versions of hip-hop and who have demonstrated that they can have artistic and commercial success in America’s mainstream without hiding their own ethnicity. Secondly, hip-hop culture gives youths a set of methods that they can use to speak about their own experiences and protest against different kinds of political actions.

Such a positive approach to the cultural interaction between African Americans and other ethnic minorities is rare in the scholarly debate on intergroup relations in the United States, but the approach is highly present in hip-hop studies. Connecting the two fields can therefore give us new aspects in the discussions on contemporary immigration and intergroup relations.

A Short Introduction to Hip-Hop Studies (and Why It Is Important)

So, while this is a thesis that primarily seeks to make a contribution to the fields of immigration and ethnicity studies, its purposes will be achieved by doing a culture analysis of interethnic relations in hip-hop culture. The thesis’ cultural analysis is limited in time, the period between 1973 and 2013, and in human subjects, ethnic minorities of color.

Originally, hip-hop was a folk culture that consisted of what the cultural pioneer Afrika Bambaataa (born Kevin Donovan) called the five elements – graffiti art, b-boying, rapping, deejaying and “doing the knowledge”. However, for over 25 years hip-hop has been a popular culture that includes what Kitwana summarizes as “hip-hop-specific language, body language, fashion, style, sensibility and worldview” (Kitwana, 2005: xii) (Aahlin URL 2012). Hip-hop contains in other words the key elements of Professor Donal Carbaugh’s definition of culture, with its “patterns of symbolic action and meaning that are deeply felt, commonly intelligible, and widely accessible to members of the hip-hop community” (McLeod, 1999: 135). Hip-hop studies is consequently the studies of a culture that is distinct from the larger African American culture from which it emerged.

Hip-hop studies is an underdeveloped field. While it is this writer's opinion that scholars on ethnic and immigration studies seldom have an adequate understanding of contemporary urban and street culture, scholars on urban culture on the other hand too often overestimate the impact of urban culture on American societies. Caught up in what they are writing about, they sometimes treat hip-hop as a social force mightier than it really is.

I am undoubtedly biased too. Nicole Balin, a white publicist in the rap music industry answered the following when asked if she and other white people in hip-hop feared a "cultural bandit": "White hip-hop kids have tried so hard to fit into hip-hop culture that to admit that is to admit that we would never be able to culturally mix – it goes against our whole belief system" (Kitwana, 2005: 162). A deeply felt relationship with hip-hop might make the writer overestimate the culture's importance in mainstream society and the importance of multicultural contact inside the culture. It is only logical that I, who have followed hip-hop culture for 16 years, should have the same biases and consequently overestimate the importance of the culture. In addition, this thesis is written entirely in Oslo and Berlin. Although two increasingly multiethnic cities with vibrant hip-hop scenes of their own, they are far, in terms of geography and urban cultures, from any of the inner-city neighborhoods that are being analyzed in this thesis.

As a result, one should be careful in criticizing the conflict thesis or the segmented assimilation theorists on the basis of the cultural conditions and new racial politics that can be seen in hip-hop. And a relatively brief thesis using qualitative techniques can perhaps only be tentative. But the purpose is not to dismiss these current trends in studies on interethnic relations between African Americans and other minorities, because they might also contain a lot of truth. The intention is rather to give the fields some important issues and questions for further studies on intergroup relations, panethnicities and new immigrant cultures, and an examination of hip-hop culture can do just that.

It will be fruitless to argue, in a thesis that is so limited in both time and resources, against the many in-depth studies that have been done in nursing homes, playgrounds, and apparel factories, and which all show conflicts between African Americans and other minorities.⁵ Just as it might be a bit too big a task for a master thesis to dismiss all the comprehensive studies that have been done in cities as diverse as Miami, New Orleans and

⁵ On conflicts and lack of contact between African Americans and other ethnic minorities, see Foner (1994: 141-142), Foner and Fredrickson (2004: 10-11), Rodriguez (1999) and Stepick, Grenier, Castro and Dunn (2003: 152).

New York, and which all show signs of negative developments following assimilation into urban African American cultures (Portes and Zhou, 1993) (Zhou and Bankston, 1998) (Waters, 2001). But this thesis nonetheless works well in critically questioning the conflict thesis, and other studies on intergroup relations that ignore or downplay the significance of new racial politics in American popular culture, because it explores a large and powerful youth culture that is characterized by African American role models and high degrees of interethnic relations. And, it works well in critically questioning segmented assimilation theories, because it illustrates several positive consequences of the cultural hybrids created in the interplay between African Americans and other ethnic minorities.

Sources

The primary sources that this thesis rests on are discourses in hip-hop culture. These discourses are found in lyrics, speeches, fashion statements, interviews, body language, and in the aesthetics of music videos and films. Discourse analysis is a qualitative method that scholars use to identify categories, themes, views, ideas, roles, and so on within the culture or texts that are being analyzed (Fulcher URL 2012). This resource method has earlier been used successively as a tool to understand different aspects of hip-hop culture by Murray Forman (2002), James Peterson (2006), Mark Anthony Neal (2012a), H. Samy Alim (2012) and, in all humility, this writer (Aahlin, 2012), and it can give us important information on how race and ethnicity are communicated and considered inside the culture and how these discourses relate to the greater society.

Hip-hop culture has existed in various forms for about 40 years, and it has a cultural production that involves a vast amount of material. I have tried my best to pick out textual material that says something about interethnic contact and racial ideas in the culture. An underlying purpose throughout the selection of sources has been to give a precise representation of hip-hop's history in terms of these topics. Of course, with so many songs, videos and interviews to pick from, there will always be room for improvements, but the materials used in this thesis will accurately illustrate both the historical and the contemporary conversations about race and ethnicity in hip-hop culture.

The advantage of studying rap music is that it is one of the world's most textual and autobiographical types of art. This music consists of a vast amount of feelings, beliefs and ideas expressed by a large and diverse group of people, which generally seldom express

themselves in public. Rap lyrics are, as the rapper Chuck D (born Carlton Douglas Ridenhour) articulated it, “important to analyze and dissect because they offer a way to look at society from a perspective rarely taken seriously” (Bradley and DuBois, 2010: xlvii).

There are a growing number of scholars who use rap lyrics and other forms of communication in hip-hop culture to analyze the relationship between African Americans and other ethnic minorities in urban America. Several good works have already been written about the cultural relationship between Puerto Ricans and African Americans in New York. Authors like Juan Flores (2012) and Raquel Z. Rivera (2001 and 2003) have laid some of the groundwork for the next chapter. Associate Professor Kembrew McLeod (1999) has written one of the most important articles about race and authenticity in hip-hop culture, which has been a direct inspiration for the third chapter. Equally important for this part of the thesis has been a publication by Assistant Professor of Sociology Oliver Wang (2012). In his essay, he looked at a vast amount of lyrics and interviews in order to understand how Asian American rappers think, act and speak about race. Finally, I build my thesis on the works done by Jeff Chang (2005) and Bakari Kitwana (2005). Both of these authors are responsible for some of the greatest writings in hip-hop studies, and they have continued to examine hip-hop culture’s ideas about race. Their works are especially important for chapter 4.

A significant part of the material consists of oral forms of communication. All transcriptions of these sources into text have been done by the undersigned, sometimes with help from the anthology *The Anthology of Rap* (Bradley and DuBois, 2010), and the two digital archives *The Original Hip-Hop (Rap) Lyrics Archive (OHHLA)* and *Rap Genius*. Transcribing rap lyrics invokes difficulties. Two complications are where to break the line when one is transcribing, and to what degree one should comprehend the slang under the transcription. I have mostly followed the online practice of transcription (Bradley and DuBois, 2010: xlvi). That means that I have tried to translate some of the slang into the textual quotations. For instance, words with an –ing-ending are quoted without the “g”, such as rapping which is quoted rappin’. When it comes to breaking the lines, I have put a “/” wherever there is a pause in the rapper’s delivery of words.

Rap music is also often explicit. Rap, after all, was, as Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois write, “the first musical genre to make cursing a customary practice” (Bradley and DuBois, 2010: xxxviii). This thesis consequently contains some explicit languages. While this might be found as offensive, it is seen as necessary for this writer to transcript the men and

women that are quoted as accurately as possible. Hip-hop culture involves homophobia, sexism, racism, and glorifications of violence, but to invoke in any type of censorship would only be an obstacle for a true and objective study of the contents and values in hip-hop culture.

Explaining the Terminology and My Choices

This work is built on some aspects of immigrant life, mainstream society in the United States, and hip-hop culture that are generally agreed on. One of these aspects is the fact that all immigrants in the history of the United States have entered a nation constructed around a black and white division. And even if it is somewhat unclear how the color line works in today's society - it could for instance be a non-black / black separation or a white / non-white division - immigrants are nonetheless generally entering a nation that recommends distance from African Americans and blackness (Foner and Fredrickson, 2004: 17). Another aspect is that while many of the social constructions, like the color line, blackness and whiteness, exist in both hip-hop culture and in the mainstream society, the same social constructions are understood differently in hip-hop culture than they are in the greater society.⁶ It is also clear that hip-hop culture has become a central part in the lives of quite a large number of non-African American minorities, and a central part of 21st century American popular culture (Wang, 2012: 216-217) (Flores, 2008: 38-39). Finally, popular culture is perhaps now more than ever an arena where ideas like Americanness and racial otherness are constantly being negotiated (Rubin and Melnick, 2007: 2).

Terminology is central to this work, and we should therefore quickly try to determine the meaning of the key concepts immigration, Americanization, assimilation, ethnicity and race. "Immigration" is, as Nancy Foner and George M. Fredrickson note, the least difficult of all the problematic terms that are used in these types of studies (Foner and Fredrickson, 2004: 2). It is in this case a broader definition on all people that migrates to the United States. The term "immigrants" are mainly referring to the people, and their descendants, that arrived in the United States after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. The act removed the racist shape of the United States' immigration and citizenship laws, and consequently set the stage for a great movement of new mass immigration from the Caribbeans, Latin America and

⁶ On social constructions in hip-hop culture, see Kitwana (2005), McLeod (1999: 140-141) and Wang (2012: 209). On social constructions in the United States, see Rubin and Melnick (2007: 4) and Spickard (2007: 124-128 & 246-250).

Asia (Spickard, 2007: 341). Of course, all these minority groups, especially Latin Americans, have histories in the United States that date back long before 1965, but the profound changes in the new social relationships and the growth in numbers of immigrants from these continents make it accurate to describe these ethnic groups as “new immigrants” (Spickard, 2007: 341-389).

The terms “Americanization” and “assimilation” are almost similar to each other, but the incorporation of American culture is a bit more forced when it is called Americanization. Kristin Weaver’s definition of assimilation as something that occurs when the immigrant goes from being an “outsider” to being “one of us” is used in this thesis (Weaver, 2010: 14). Professor of History Paul Spickard claims that because the United States are constructed around racial or panethnic formations the “assimilation model does not work for people of color. No amount of wishing will make it so” (Spickard, 2007: 14 & 25). Although I sympathize with Spickard’s way of thinking, I find this point of view as being too static. This thesis, and particularly chapter 4, illustrate that ethnic minorities operate in cultures that are much more complex than Spickard’s panethnic society (Spickard, 2007: 25). By using Weaver’s definition, the thesis is able to focus on the immigrant’s ability to be accepted in hip-hop culture. She writes that assimilation into mainstream American culture is “dependent on both the immigrant and the host society” (Weaver, 2010: 14). Acculturation into hip-hop culture has been guided, as chapter two and three illustrate, by African Americans. A person’s ability to integrate into hip-hop culture has in other words been dependent on the same combination of acceptances as someone’s ability to integrate into mainstream culture.

“Ethnicity” and “race” are both problematic terms. While the conception of race has no scientific legitimacy, ethnicity has at least some substance as a term used to distinguish groups with common cultural characteristics. But despite being an analytical sharper category than race, ethnicity is also a woolen term (Foner and Fredrickson, 2004: 2-4). The exact scientific value of the two terms are however less important for this thesis. The key part here is that through racial formation and identity negotiation, the United States is a country that contains social differentiations based on skin color, religion and cultural background (Cornell and Hartmann, 2004: 25-26). This thesis is occupied with the idea of racial “otherness,” and how people of color identify themselves and others. The terms that they use to self-identify, as well as to describe others, have been established through social constructions, but the central part is that they have substance for the people that employ them. Race and ethnicity

are therefore both used in this thesis to describe groups that are perceived to have particular traits, real or imaginary, attached to them.

The main question in the thesis invites us to look at a rather broad topic. Unfortunately, a study such as this forces us to sometimes generalize and lump people together under banners like “people of color” and “non-African American minorities.” Those banners are however only used when it is appropriate to refer to such broad definitions. So when the thesis for instance states that “the music of KRS-One, N.W.A. and Public Enemy echoed the thoughts and experiences of a lot of non-African American youths of color in cities in the United States,” it is referring to the fact that all minorities had a significant number of young members that shared the experiences and ideas of African American artists like KRS-One and Chuck D.

Nonetheless, the topics that are discussed in this thesis are of course more fitting to the experiences of some colored minorities than they are to others. The different parts of the thesis have therefore focused specially on some specific minority groups. The reasons behind the choices are described in the next section.

Chapter Outline

This introductory chapter has described my personal motivation for writing this particular thesis, and the theoretical framework behind it. Most importantly, it has illustrated how the research question – if the experiences and the history of hip-hop culture can counterbalance the major trend’s pessimistic views on interethnic relations - fit into existing scholarly conversations on race, ethnicity and immigration. The rest of the thesis will consist of three main chapters and the conclusion. All three chapters are divided into two parts. The first is always a theoretical construction of the argument, while the second consists of case in points that will verify the arguments.

In the next chapter, I will compare the concurrent dynamics in terms of interethnic relations between the gang and the street fighting scenes in certain East Coast cities in the beginning of the 20th century with the gang scene and the early development of hip-hop-culture in New York in the 1970s. The second part of this chapter takes this “then and now”-approach further, and uses the Puerto Ricans in New York and especially the Puerto Rican DJ Charlie Chase as cases in point on the similarities between Irish Americans and African

Americans historical positions as role models for immigrants. Puerto Ricans in New York are chosen because the experience of this group is the best example of an interethnic relationship between African Americans and another minority that contradicts the conflict thesis.

The thesis' third chapter will explain how a set of ideas about race and ethnicity have developed in hip-hop culture, and how these new racial ideas and politics are in direct conflict with the racial ideas and politics that are already established in the greater society. The theoretical construction of this chapter is that hip-hop culture connects authenticity with blackness and by doing so it has made blackness an attractive element of American life for certain members of non-African American minorities. Part two follows this trail and uses the experiences of Asian Americans, and especially the rapper Jin, to illustrate how the connection between authenticity and a partly stereotypical conception of blackness is problematic for Asian American participators in hip-hop culture. Being too Asian, which is seen as being not black enough, is a liability in hip-hop culture (Wang, 2012: 209). Asian American artists and followers are therefore articulating and conducting themselves with great racial sensitivity, and they are clearly expressing that the common bipolar American racial ideology is insufficient for their experiences in hip-hop culture.

The first two main chapters show that hip-hop has conflicting ideas about race. They illustrate that hip-hop is not a mythological space where old ideas about race are insignificant, but hip-hop culture has nonetheless brought with it new racial politics. Chapter 4 demonstrates how young people are seeking to access hip-hop as an agent of social change. It is here that black, white, Asian, and Latino youths have the most experience in forming multicultural alliances and coalitions (Kitwana, 2005: 162) (Chang, 2005: 453-465). Since the late 1980s, hip-hop activists have organized across race and ethnicity to confront problems that are very specific to their generation. This new racial politics can be found in street activism, cultural journalism, indie film, pop music and rap radio, and it has attracted throughout the last decades a great number of American youths with Asian, Arab and Latin backgrounds.

If African American culture continues to be an idealized tool for describing and protesting the war on youths and certain other political issues that all ethnic minorities experience, then it is likely that assimilation into black America is not necessary one and the same as downward assimilation. The last part of chapter 4 employs multiracial protests against police brutality as a case in point to illustrate how non-African American minorities

have successfully used African American traditions and hip-hop culture in order to be heard, create counterdominant narratives and gain political and social influence. While this is an examination of hip-hop as a potential political tool for all people of color, it has a particular focus on Latin Americans in California. This group is chosen because their recent history contains some of the most interesting examples of a non-African American minority employment of hip-hop as a political weapon.

The concluding chapter will be a short summary of the three main chapters, give a presentation of the thesis' most important findings, and finally some new interesting questions will be asked.

2 From Gangs to Hip-Hop - Walking the Line between Interethnic Conflict and Interethnic Harmony in Hip-Hop's Early Years

Hip-hop culture evolved out of an urban space marked by devastation and violence. MC Shan's famous verse from the song "They Used to Do It Out in the Park" explains vividly how hip-hop culture and gang culture coexisted, overlapped, and eventually grew into one another:

They had battles of the neighborhood jocks / And I used to take the jam right straight to the box / Every now and then you'd hear gunshots ring / Just duck, what the fuck, yo, it ain't no thing / What I thought was shots was just a few pranksters / Were pow-pow-pow men juicin' the gangsters / Hip-Hop – was set out in the dark / They used to do it out in the park (MC Shan, 1988: "They Used to Do It Out in the Park.").

The transition between gangs and hip-hop culture is a debatable and mythical one. Most writings on hip-hop culture's early years must contain a short history of the street gangs. For this particular thesis, it would be valuable to ask if the transformation from street gangs to hip-hop culture carried with it any interethnic collaborations, conflicts or relations.

Consequently, this chapter examines interethnic relations in the gang scene and in the early years of hip-hop culture in New York in the 1970s. The dynamics between African Americans and Latin Americans in this city's urban culture evolved, with the transition from gangs to hip-hop, into a very interesting interethnic relationship. That relationship is concurrent with the interethnic contact that existed between Irish Americans and certain other European immigrant groups in the gang and street fighting scenes in East Coast cities at the beginning of the 20th century. This chapter accordingly argues that hip-hop is the invention, or the solidification, of an urban American culture in which African Americans are guides and gatekeepers, in the same way that Irish Americans once were guides and gatekeepers in a

limited urban space. This again is differing from the conflict thesis' take on interethnic relations.

The argument above is the backbone of this chapter. The first part of this chapter is a theoretical construction to underlay this argument, while the second part is a case in point to illustrate how the interethnic relationship between African Americans and Puerto Ricans in New York became a junior partnership with the development of hip-hop culture.

A Quick Summary of the Multicultural Background of Hip-Hop Culture

Hip-hop is considered an African American culture. This is a fair consideration, because this is a culture that is mostly rooted in African American history and traditions, and because it was mainly invented and developed by African Americans. However, hip-hop started in the 1970s, and developed through the next 15 years, as a culture that was predominantly, but not exclusively, made up of African Americans. Hip-hop went against segregation, which for the years preceding this movement's existence had become more and more a dominant norm in American music and arts. Some observers, like the legendary graffiti writer Zephyr (born Andrew Witten), even go as far as saying that the core of hip-hop is not its four elements (rapping, b-boying, deejaying and graffiti), but instead multiculturalism, social activism and compassion (Zephyr, 2004: 6).

Hip-hop has had levels of contact between African Americans and other ethnic minorities that are, according to numerous studies of this subject, rare in an American context (Flores, 2008: 35-36).⁷ The author Jeff Chang for example summarized the early hip-hop scene in New York, as "a place where race and class segregation was out and cultural crossover was in" (Chang, 2012: 30). He based this conclusion on, amongst other things, firsthand accounts from Zephyr and Charlie Ahearn. Ahearn is the writer and producer behind the important hip-hop movie *Wild Style* (1982), and according to him, hip-hop brought with it changes that were very exciting to people. Ahearn notes especially the "racial thing" as a "big deal": "Mixing a lot of Black, Puerto Rican and white people downtown all together is very combustible, because people are coming from very different types of areas and they are

⁷ On the low degree of contact between African Americans and other ethnic minorities in the United States, see Foner (1994, 141-142), Foner and Fredrickson (2004: 10-13), Grenier and Perez (1996: 370-371), Jones-Correa (1998: 32), Rodriguez (1999) and Tatum (1999).

getting used to the idea that they can hang out with each other” (Chang, 2012: 30). The mixing and mingling of Caribbean, African American, and Latino communities in the boroughs of New York City consequently set the stage for the development of what became known as hip-hop music and culture (Norfleet, 2006, 354) (Rivera, 2001: 237).

Case studies on interethnic relations in inner cities have often revealed that there are hardly any contacts between the different ethnic groups. In Queens, New York, communities overlap but refuse to touch. On the playgrounds in Houston, Hispanic youths are playing football while African American youths are playing basketball (Jones-Correa, 1998: 32) (Rodriguez, 1999). However, the quotations from Zephyr and Ahearn, movies like *Wild Style* (1982) and *Style Wars* (1983), and photos taken by Martha Cooper (2004) and Jamel Shabazz (2001) visualize graffiti and b-boying scenes that consisted of both African Americans, Latin Americans and European Americans. This was particularly true for the b-boy-scene in which Puerto Rican and other Latin American kids played and competed with young African Americans. Today this multiethnic culture lives on in ciphers, hip-hop activist groups, battle grounds, graffiti groups and b-boy scenes across urban America. Of course, there have been areas of contention and distrust also in hip-hop culture (Flores, 2008: 35). It is certainly possible to find quotations and historical happenings in hip-hop’s history that underlie the conflict thesis.⁸ Nevertheless, hip-hop is generally an urban culture that has said, and continues to say, that the academically focus on segregation, strain and conflict between African Americans and other minorities in urban America is partly undue (Foner & Fredrickson, 2004: 10) (Flores, 2008: 35-36).

Panethnic Basis in the Gangs of New York

⁸ There are several examples of interethnic conflicts in hip-hop. Two of the most central incidents are the violent clash in 1981 between Puerto Rican b-boys in the Rock Steady Crew and Dominican b-boys in the Ball Busters (Cooper, 2004: 78-79), and the conflict between Ice Cube and his group Westside Connection and Cypress Hill. The later developed, according to the documentary *Beef II* (2004), into a conflict with ethnical undertones. While the Mexican Mafia in Los Angeles supposedly wanted to get involved in the conflict on the side of the partly Latin American group Cypress Hill, the African American rapper Ice Cube said the following about Cypress Hill in the song “King of the Hill” (1996): “Everybody in the ghetto know what you’re doing / One white boy and 2 fucking Cubans / Claiming that you’re Loco, but you ain’t Mexican / Listen to ‘No Vaseline’ before you flex again.”

Hip-hop has also sparked conflicts between Asian Americans and African Americans. These conflicts have usually happened as a result of African American recordings that contains racist lyrics. The most known example is Ice Cube’s conflict with the Asian American community following the song “Black Korea” (1991) (Lie, 2004: 302). Other remarkably racist recordings are Onyx’s “Bichasbootleguz” (1993) and Shazzy’s “Chinese Delivery” (1990) (Jenkins et al., 1999: 270). Another interesting example is the hip-hop radio channel Hot 97’s continuous airing of the “Tsunami Song” (2005), a song that features a tasteless series of jokes about Asians drowning after the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami (Hatch-Miller 2005 URL) (Hinckley 2005 URL).

We are tired of praying and marching and thinking and learning. Brothers want to start cutting and shooting and stealing and burning (Scott-Heron, 1970: “Evolution (and Flashback)”).

The quotation above, from the spoken-word artist Gil Scott-Heron, summarized much of the feelings that so many young people of color had in the beginning of the 1970s. If there ever was a proof on politics of abandonment, Bronx in this period was certainly it. Both the Civil Rights movement and the more militant groups, equally admired, studied and copied by every other minority group in the United States, were all but defeated (Chang, 2005: 7-20) (Kasinitz, 2004: 289). With almost all of their leaders either dead or in prison, a generation of African Americans was driven out into unemployment, apathy and political indifference. By the mid-seventies, average per capita income dropped to \$2,430 in the South Bronx, just half of the New York City average and 40 percent of the nationwide average. 600,000 manufacturing jobs in the borough were lost. The official youth unemployment rate reached 60 percent. In some neighborhoods it even hit close to 80 percent (Aahlin, 2012 URL) (Chang, 2005: 13). This led Jeff Chang to the conclusion that “if blues culture had developed under the conditions of oppressive, forced labor, hip-hop culture would arise from the conditions of no work” (Chang, 2005: 13).

But before hip-hop developed as a street and a folk culture, the street gangs had reemerged. The earlier gangs in New York were most notably Irish, Italian or Jewish Americans, but now they consisted mostly of African Americans and Latin Americans (Howell & Moore, 2010: 2-4). The transition from gangs to hip-hop culture brought with it both interethnic relations and conflicts, but the evolution from gangs to hip-hop also involved changed power structures in certain urban neighborhoods.

Interethnic solidarity is, as Frederic Thrasher, and James C. Howell and John P. Moore have shown, nothing new in gang culture (Barrett & Roediger, 2005: 16). Gangs have had different level of interethnic relations and composition of members since the late 18th century (Howell & Moore, 2010: 2). Black Spades, The Ghetto Brothers and Renegades of Harlem are some of the gangs that had visions of creating solidarity across certain predefined racial and ethnic borders, in ways similar to the Irish-led white gangs of the early 19th century (Barrett & Roediger, 2005: 16). While Irish American gangs, like Ragen’s Colts, often looked for alliances based on Catholicism and/or white pan-ethnicity, the colored gangs of the 1960s

and 1970s made alliances based on common cultures and on their non-whiteness (Roediger & Barrett, 2004: 177-179).

These alliances were further strengthened when certain gangs and some gang members tried to evolve from gangbanging to street artistry. The Ghetto Brothers for instance started to make music that sounded like “Santana meeting Sly & the Family Stone” (*A Day in the Bronx Part 1*, 2010). These new street cultures were indeed rooted in both African American and Latino traditions (Chang, 2005: 64-65). Puerto Rican Popmaster Fabel (born Jorge Pabon), who has been in the leadership of both the Rock Steady Crew, a very famous Puerto Rican b-boying crew, and Zulu Nation, a multicultural hip-hop movement that evolved out of the Black Spades, claims that both the black and the Latino gangs were feeding off the energy and the momentum of the Black Panthers and other revolutionary African American organizations. Meanwhile, instrumental voices of the gang moment, like Karate Charlie and Bam Bam, have described the unity between African American and Latino gang members that appeared when The Ghetto Brothers started working with the Black Spades and the Savage Skulls (*A Day in the Bronx, Part 2*, 2010) (*A Day in the Bronx, Part 3*, 2010). Now, the gangs’ political sides are often overestimated. Most of them were indifferent to politics, and to a large degree guided by egocentric and violent behavior, but there were also gangs that displaced pride of their cultures and neighborhoods and gangs that offered less fortunate youths a community (Chang, 2005: 41-65).

Nonetheless, most of the gangs included both collaborations and confrontations between ethnic groups. These mixed relations built on, as well as overruled, ethnical and racial lines. This duality imitated Irish Americans mixed actions against fellow European immigrants (Barrett and Roediger, 2005: 7-16). This is unsurprising, because the exclusive quality of urban space is a history lesson that African Americans learnt directly from the Irish (Barrett and Roediger, 2005: 7). Irish Americans were discriminated in many ways by the Anglo American majority, but they were in some ways masters in a limited urban area. This model was partly taken over by African Americans as they increased in numbers in some northern cities.⁹ The new African American gangs copied the older Irish American ones in how they drew boundaries and marked their terrains, and this was done with the same conflicting approach towards ethnicity and ethnic lines as in the earlier gang scene. This is particularly

⁹ I wish to emphasize the word “partly” here. African Americans took over some of the street aspects of the Irish American’s urban power, but they have never run the police, the unions or other institutions as the Irish Americans once did.

seen in the way the gangs interchangeably used and dismissed ideas of panethnicity.¹⁰ Let us first look at the gangs in Chicago in the early 20th century that Thrasher studied:

With some notable exceptions, Thrasher argued, “conflict between gangs is organized primarily on a territorial rather than on a racial or nationality basis.” As an example, he noted the “brutal” fights for control of the old Irish neighborhood of Bridgeport between the “Shielders” and the “Dukies,” both primarily Irish gangs separated by the deadline of an abandoned street car track along Fortieth Street. But such territorial gangs could and did coalesce on the basis of broader racial identities (Barrett and Roediger, 2005: 14).

Then we take a closer look at the newer gangs. We see that they were extremely territorial, more so than ethnically restricted, but they in fact coalesce from time to time on the basis of broader racial identities. Jeff Chang has described New York City in the 1970s like this:

Below Crotona Park, in the heart of the burnt-out South Bronx, were the turfs of the Ghetto Brothers, the Turbans, the Peacemakers, the Mongols, the Roman Kings, the Seven Immortals and the Dirty Dozens. Most of these gangs were predominantly Puerto Rican. East of the Bronx River, the Black Spades consolidated the youths of the mostly African-American communities. Further east and north across Fordham Road, in the last white communities in the Bronx, gangs like the Arthur Avenue Boys, Golden Guineas, War Pigs and the Grateful Dead were foot soldiers for angry wiseguys who spent their days cursing the imminent loss of their neighborhood (Chang, 2005: 42-43).

This was in the Bronx alone. Estimations on gangs in the whole of New York City show that about 60 percent of the gangs consisted of Puerto Ricans and African Americans (Howell & Moore, 2010: 4). The territorial lines, partly based on ethnicity, in New York at that time are comparable to the territorial lines that existed in Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York in the early 20th century (Barrett and Roediger, 2005: 7-9) (Zukin, 1995: 192-207). Moreover, as in earlier times, the territorial gangs could coalesce in different ways inside a basis of a broader white / non-white racial identity. Sometimes the divisions inside the broader panethnicity were ignored, as for instance was seen when the Latin American gang The Seven Immortals and the African American gang The Black Spades clashed with the Latin American gang The Ghetto Brothers. At other times, African- and Latin Americans came together on a broader non-white identity, for instance seen when a partnership between Black Spades and The Ghetto Brothers pushed Hells Angeles out of the Bronx (*A Day in the Bronx, Part 3*, 2010). There was in other words a duality in the new gangs inspired by older gang traditions, and this duality existed always inside a racial division of white and non-white.

¹⁰ The panethnicities that are described here are a white panethnicity that European gangs once gathered around, and a non-white panethnicity that gangs like the Black Spades and the Ghetto Brothers sometimes used.

One can argue that there is a major difference between the new gang situation described here and the composition of the old gangs in the beginning of the 20th century, because the Irish Americans had a sovereign position in these inner-city neighborhoods that African Americans in the 1960s and 1970s never matched. While this is true, African Americans had nonetheless a position as role models. This is in particular exemplified with The Ghetto Brothers and the Young Lords Party. These gangs represented the Nuyorican movement, and were respectively dominated by Puerto Ricans and ethnically homogenous, but they were also extremely influenced by African American culture and political movements. Just as Irish Americans involvement in the Irish national liberation struggle had been influential for Chicago's Slavic workers pressing and fighting for foreign policy change, African American revolutionary movements were role models for the Young Lords attempt to export a revolution from New York to Puerto Rico (Chang, 2005: 47-48) (Roediger & Barrett, 2004: 179-180). Politically, The Ghetto Brothers also paid homage to Black Panthers and Nation of Islam, which clearly inspired their organizational structure. Culturally, one can see the African American influences in their different types of poetry, spoken word and music (Chang, 2005: 64-65) (Rubin and Melnick, 2007: 114-122).

Perhaps the best answer to the earlier raised question of whether the transition from street gangs to hip-hop culture brought with it any interethnic relations is found in the evolvement of Black Spades and its successor; the international organization Zulu Nation. The Black Spades was at one point the biggest African American street gang in New York City, and they had, despite of their racially and geographically restricted foundation, slowly evolved into a movement that was ideologically more ethnical inclusive. This is mainly seen in how The Black Spades more and more frequently collaborated with Latin American gangs. This progress accelerated when the Black Spades turned into the multicultural offspring Zulu Nation. The development was a continuation of the interethnic relations that had developed in the gang scene, and which extended with new cultural creations based on solidarity behind ethnical and racial boundaries. "Now one thing people must know", says Afrika Bambaataa, the founder of Zulu Nation, "that when we say Black we mean all our Puerto Rican or Dominican brothers. Wherever the hip-hop was and the Blacks was, the Latinos and the Puerto Ricans was, too" (George, 2012: 49). Zulu Nation quickly became a tool to fight racism and discrimination, not just against African Americans, but also against Puerto Ricans:

Then you had the clubs that didn't want hip-hop nowhere down there like the
Limelight. They would make a dress code 'cause there were too many Blacks and

Puerto Ricans coming into the neighborhood. That's when I started fighting racism down in the club scene. I would say, "If you don't let my Blacks or Puerto Ricans in, I'm gonna leave" (George, 2012: 53).

We can conclude that the early hip-hop's multiethnic facet grew from the interethnic relations of the street gangs of the 1960s and 1970s. Tricia Rose writes that hip-hop was a part of a cross-cultural communication network that evolved out of a broader discursive climate in which the "perspectives and experiences of younger Hispanic, Afro-Caribbeans and African Americans had been provided little social space" (Rose, 2008: 26). This cross-cultural communication network advanced into hip-hop culture from the gangs and other earlier street cultures. Furthermore, the duality between panethnicity and ethnicity seen in these gangs is similar to the duality found in the Irish-led white gangs of the early 19th century, and this duality also continued into hip-hop culture (Barrett and Roediger, 2005: 16). This is particularly a true description of the relationship between African Americans and Puerto Ricans. As Juan Flores writes:

Among young blacks and Puerto Ricans, hip hop has generally been a mortar of remarkable intensity, probably unmatched in the interracial war zone of contemporary U.S. society (...) But another attraction of hip hop, equally a part of its underlying ethos, is that it shows how to draw boundaries, mark off terrain, face up to differences and call them by their name. Here again the interaction of black and Puerto Rican youth in the incubation of rap sets the stage for the momentous act to follow (Flores, 2008: 35-36).

Cultural Power in Urban Space: The Black Dominance in Rap Music

The interesting aspect here is that African Americans acquired a much more dominant role in these limited urban environments with the transition from gang culture to hip-hop culture. African Americans had participated, and sometimes been role models, in the street gangs, but with hip-hop they got into a position from the start as a group that controlled and decided most aspects of the culture.

Hip-hop was built around the idea that urban areas are space that contains unique qualities. This idea is seen in graffiti, in battling and in the culture as a whole. Popmaster Fabel for instance explains the revolutionary origins of hip-hop through its use of the urban landscape: "We just came out, took over the parks without a permit. Jacked the electricity from the lamppost. (...) And under any means necessary we had our cultural imperative.

Which is what? A communal sense of celebration” (*A Day in the Bronx, Part 2*, 2010). It can be argued that the use, dominance and celebration of urban space as we have seen in hip-hop are inspired by the urban traditions of Irish Americans. Caroline Ware, a historian who focused on the Greenwich Village, wrote in 1935 that the “Irish were very much of the Italians’ world, occupying the same houses, the same jobs, and the same streets” (Barrett and Roediger, 2004: 168). For the Italians immigrants America was the Irish controlled neighborhoods (Barrett and Roediger, 2005: 7-16). Just as the African American neighborhoods of Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn were the United States for Caribbean and Latino immigrants (Chang, 2005: 72-73). While Italian Americans behaved and acted in ways inspired and controlled by the Irish Americans, the actions and behavior of Caribbean Americans were equally inspired and controlled by African Americans. Caribbean immigrants began for example to adjust their musical practices in order to suit local African American tastes (Norfleet, 2006: 353-354).

Caribbean Americans, such as one of the founders of the culture DJ Kool Herc (born Clive Campbell), were fundamental for the development of the sound aspects of hip-hop culture. Rapping and deejaying are not just rooted in African American cultures and history, but in the musical traditions of Jamaica and in the general cultural and verbal traditions of the African Diaspora as well. It draws on the “jive-talking” style of African American radio personalities of the 1940s and 1950s, African American oral traditions of storytelling, Jamaican traditions of mobile disk jockey (DJ) units and posses, and on common African traditions such as “boasting”, “toasting” and “playing the dozens”.¹¹ It is not surprising that hip-hop music had such a diverse sphere of influences, because the block parties were marked by a high degree of interethnic contact. Many of the participators in these parties were Caribbean immigrants who tried to adjust to their African American surroundings. Kool Herc explained that he deliberately lost all trails of his Jamaican accent, and that he had only lived in the United States for a few years when he had gained Jamaican friends who did not even know that he was also Jamaican (Chang, 2005: 73). In the Bronx, where African American gangs literally threw Jamaican immigrants in garbage cans, Herc, like thousands of other Caribbean immigrants, found it best to reinvent himself (Chang, 2005: 72-73). Hip-hop became a useful tool for Jamaican Americans to insert themselves into the cultural mainstream of the United States (Rubin and Melnick, 2007: 15).

¹¹ On the origins of hip-hop music see Norfleet (2006: 353), Forman (2012b: 254), Gates Jr. (2010: xxii-xxv) and the documentary *Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap* (2012).

Here is a similarity between the meetings of Americans from Ireland and Italian Americans and of African and Jamaican Americans. Both Italian and Jamaican immigrants used scraps of what they found to be the dominant culture, which were respectively Irish American and African American traditions, and combined it with scraps of their own cultures. The creations of these hybrid cultures were part of the Americanization of these immigrant groups. However, inside these comparative experiences there is also a factor that separates Irish Americans historical role from the more contemporary role of African Americans. Barrett and Roediger write that we “think in terms of new immigrants learning new values including U.S.-style racism, from something as large and amorphous as the ‘host society’” (Barrett and Roediger, 2004: 168). The two of them conclude that such a view is not wrong because, amongst other things, mass-marketed cultures shape the lives and knowledge of new immigrants. Irish Americans’ influential role in shaping and controlling new immigrants rested on their position as an ethnic group already established in American cities. In the larger sense, in consideration of law and ideology of the nation, and mass cultures, Irish Americans played a much more humble part (Barrett and Roediger, 2004: 168).

This is different for African Americans, who could shape new immigrants both in terms of the larger sense, through popular culture, and through the equally important local sense as neighbors, co-workers and competitors. It has been called attention to the fact that new immigrants learn about, and is shaped by, U.S.-style racism from the “host society”, and that they therefore shy away or distance themselves from African Americans (Trotter, 2004: 91-92). This might be partly true, but the picture is incomplete as long as African Americans distinguished position inside mass-marketed culture stays overlooked. As Norfleet writes:

Jamaican migrants to the United States were already familiar with the music of African Americans through American soldiers stationed in Jamaica during World War II and American radio broadcasting of swing, bebop, and rhythm and blues. African American dance music grew in popularity, particularly at “blues dances” that took place primarily in economically poor urban areas in the 1950s (Norfleet, 2006: 354).

Similar stories can be found around the world. For example during the era of military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985), *Black Soul* events, consisting of inter alia soul music and other parts of African American popular culture, became for Brazilians an important tool for self-awareness and political protest (Perry, 2012: 297-298).

This is a type of influence that few minorities in the United States’ history have contained. The “host society” in the largest sense gives new immigrants mixed inputs on

African Americans and on blackness. The ideology and laws of the nation, the popular cultures of the country and employment decisions teach new immigrants what Barrett and Roediger calls U.S.-style racism and advise them to stay away from African Americans. However, the “host society” is at the same time sending, through mass-market culture, imageries of African Americans and blackness that contain certain positive elements. With the continuously increased blackness of American popular culture, and with the United States’ continuously increased soft power, this is truer today than ever (Rumbaut, 1999: 189).

This is often overlooked, but the truth is that the presentation of African Americans in popular culture is quite diverse. This ethnic group has generally been portrayed rather varied in popular culture ever since the post-civil rights era. By pointing to a diverse range of sitcoms, talk shows, and music videos, Kitwana concludes that:

African Americans are not a monolith in pop culture---not all representations are stereotypes, and not all are defying them either. Given the increased importance of popular culture in the lives of American youth and the increasing visibility of Blacks within it, generation Xers have come of age with a greater familiarity with some aspects of Black culture than earlier generations (Kitwana, 2005: 40-41).

This does not mean that the positive aspects are mightier than the negative presentations of African Americans in the media, far from it. It is quite certain that the effects of the signals that the “host society” sends out about African Americans and blackness are overly negative, stereotypical and critical.¹² However, through popular music, TV-shows like *Chappelle’s Show* (2003-2004), *The Boondocks* (2005-2010) and *Weeds* (2005-2007), and any other cultural phenomenon that shape new immigrants before and after their arrivals in the United States, blackness is often presented as something that contains certain attractive elements. This is especially the case for young people. “Styles that develop on the streets are”, as sociologist Sharon Zukin writes, “cycled through mass media, especially fashion and urban music magazines and MTV, where, divorced from their social context, they become images of cool” (Zukin, 1995: 9).

But hip-hop, and other types of street culture, also finds its way to a substantial audience without losing its context. Hip-hop can create in these cases, because of the culture’s aesthetics, a common experience of oppression between African Americans and other ethnic groups in the United States or abroad. One such example is the young

¹² A study that underlies this point is the report “Off Balance: Youth, Race, and Crime in the News”, by Berkeley Media Studies and the Justice Policy Institute. The 2001 joint study concluded that blacks were too often portrayed as perpetrators and disproportionately as victims (Kitwana, 2002: 79-80).

Palestinians and Arabic Israelis, who call themselves the “black people of the Middle East”. This is for instance seen in the documentary *Slingshot Hip Hop* (2008). Usama Kahf argues convincingly that these artists recognize the origins of hip-hop in African American culture, and that they are consequently not removing the culture from its context (Kahf, 2012: 117). African Americans have through hip-hop made a great number of young people feel a kinship through common experiences of oppression. This again has resulted in hybrid genres of music like Arabic hip-hop. The genre is immensely popular in the Middle East and in North Africa with artist like the Palestinian group DAM and the revolutionary Tunisian rapper Hamada Ben Amor (Kahf, 2012: 117) (Riley URL 2012). How do these factors shape young immigrants and refugees coming into to the United States today?

Research done on the subject has revealed that it is fair to suggest that American hip-hop, and the hybrid culture and arts it creates, makes a great number of potential immigrants feel more positive and connected towards blackness and African Americans. Anthropologist Marc D. Perry has for instance illustrated how young people in Cuba and South Africa have come to identify themselves as blacks, despite the fact that they could have escaped the discriminating notions of blackness. They actively push for a black identity, even though blackness is, or was in the actual situation, a racial label that would make life more difficult in the two countries (Perry, 2012: 301-311). In Havana, Perry spoke with young people that in Cuba would be identified as *jabao*.¹³ Many of these Cubans identified themselves as black, even though the country’s racial classification would not characterize them as such. These self-identifications were rooted in hip-hop culture’s black-signified aesthetics (Perry, 2012: 302-304). Jabao-rappers are, also according to Perry, “actively positioning themselves and their politics within a broader Afrodiasporic context of present-day black struggle” (Perry, 2012: 303). The same was seen in South Africa during the apartheid-era, when colored rappers in Cape Town deployed blackness as an identity-based social marker (Perry, 2012: 306-310).¹⁴ Several groups and rappers, like Prophets of Da City, identified as blacks or Africans in order to push for a broadened and more racially inclusive notion of blackness and to place “mixed-race” members within an “historical continuum of black political struggle and consciousness in South-Africa” (Perry, 2012: 308).

¹³ Jabao is a term used in Cuba to describe people with light brown skin and hair.

¹⁴ Perry writes that, “Coloreds, as people of ‘mixed-race,’ were legally classified under apartheid’s racialized caste system, literally occupied the racial middle-ground, historically positioned by the apartheid state as a buffer between worlds of white and black” (Perry, 2012: 307).

Studies have also revealed how American hip-hop makes numerous minority members in the United States more positive towards and connected to blackness and African Americans. This is especially seen in analysis of African American and Puerto Rican connections in New York. While classical Hollywood movies like *West Side Story* (1961) and *The Young Savages* (1961) operate in a New York without any cultural links or geographical connections between Puerto Ricans and African Americans, the truth is that the social and cultural experiences of Puerto Ricans, African Americans and blackness have been constantly entwined since at least the 1950s.¹⁵ This is naturally reflected in all types of arts made by the two ethnic groups. Two of the most important African American and Puerto Rican nexuses in New York were graffiti and b-boying, the most multicultural elements of early hip-hop culture.

Puerto Ricans as Hip-Hop's Authentic Little Brother

B-boying, the visual part of hip-hop culture, was from the start, and still is, the most multicultural element of hip-hop. B-boying was popularized especially by Puerto Rican and other non-African American minorities (Chang, 2012: 33) (Flores, 2012: 78). As DJ Kool Herc puts it: "Puerto Ricans carried breakdancing" (George, 2012: 46). That is not to say that it is not rooted in African American culture, because b-boying came out of African American dances and jazz. But b-boying also built on salsa, Afro-Cuban and various Native American dances, and gradually South American dances like capoeira (Chang, 2012: 33) (Pabon, 2012: 58). Nancy Foner and George M. Fredrickson make some qualified guesses on a bright future for a black panethnicity, but the rise of b-boying and rapping remains in 2013 as some of the few occurrences that really resemble the idea of a black Atlantic or black Diaspora panethnicity.¹⁶

¹⁵ On the connections between African Americans and Puerto Ricans in New York see Flores (2008: 33), Rubin and Melnick (2007: 114-122), del Barco (1996) and Rivera (2001).

¹⁶ Foner and Fredrickson write the following on black panethnicity: "It is hard to avoid the conclusion that American society as a whole would be better off if blacks could characterize themselves and be characterized by others as an ethnic group rather than a race. The combination of group memory, consciousness of common descent, and shared culture already constitutes a strong basis for black self-respect and, if racism could be truly overcome, would invite the respect of other Americans. But such an ethnicity might have one drawback. A normal degree of ethnic specificity might limit membership in the group to descendants of those who were enslaved in the southern United States, thereby excluding black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean, who have had somewhat different group memories, cultural traditions, and historical experiences. But a black panethnicity is already being constructed around the concepts of "the Black Diaspora" and the "Black Atlantic." Panethnicities, as we have seen, are difficult to construct, but this one might have a brighter future than most" (Foner & Fredrickson, 2004: 9-10). Ideas and aesthetics of Black panethnicity are seen in all parts of hip-hop

Graffiti, the other visual element of the culture, rapidly expanded “from a casual urban youth practice to a fully evolved cultural pastime” (Castleman, 2012: 13). As New York was on the verge of bankruptcy and neighborhoods were suffering, writers were defensively positioned against the State and police surveillance. Craig Castleman and others have shown how multiethnic crews of youths were up against the anti-graffiti crusade and the New York’s Metropolitan Transit Authority (Castleman, 2012: 13) (Cooper, 2004: 30-31).

The history of the so-called golden age of graffiti in New York is one of many stories of a culture in which African Americans take the leading positions in a movement with Puerto Rican, Latino and white followers. While it is a story of African American leadership and African American as role models in an urban multiethnic environment, it is also part of New York’s story of “harsh punitive measures targeting mainly blacks and Latinos” (Castleman, 2012: 13) (Chang, 2012: 26-31). Moreover, it is the story of the social construction of the underclass.¹⁷

Nathan Glazer was a bit melodramatic when he wrote that “while I do not find myself consciously making the connection between graffiti-makers and the criminals who occasionally rob, rape, assault, and murder [subway] passengers, the sense that all are part of one world of uncontrollable predators seems inescapable” (Forman, 2012a: 11). But Glazer managed to describe the uneasiness other people began to feel towards the urban, colored youth scene. Even Martha Cooper, one of the most important graffiti pioneers, shared Glazer’s unease. “I could understand why people were upset. They felt they’d lost control over their environment. (...) They felt assaulted and I could understand that point of view” (Cooper, 2004: 46 & 51). Even more than the musical part, graffiti gave hip-hop a criminal mystique, which would later have consequences for so many young non-white people.

For the young writers however, it was nothing criminal in what they were doing. “I don’t see anything bad in this. Writing gave kids something as far as branching out, meeting

culture, and especially in rap music. A very good example on this is *The Carnival* (1997), an album by the Haitian American artist Wyclef Jean. The album is constructed as an audio tour throughout the black world, from Haiti to New York to Africa to Cuba to Brazil. The ideas of a black panethnicity expressed in hip-hop are often quite broad and inclusive.

¹⁷ Part of the social construction of the “underclass” is shaped by hip-hop culture and people’s conceptions and misconceptions of that culture. As Sharon Zukin writes “If this [mass entertainment] is the only source of public culture, there is less distance between subcultures and between ‘ghetto’ and ‘mainstream’ identities. Then social distance is reestablished by developing new cultural differences, confirming the cultural power of fear” (Zukin, 1995: 42-43). Not only is hip-hop a large part of this social construction, but African Americans have also through hip-hop created a blueprint for protesting the new stigmatization. The blueprint has later been widely used by other minorities who also have been victimized by the “underclass”-stigmatization. This is something that the thesis will analyze more thoroughly in the fourth chapter.

people. There is no racism in graffiti, because we're all brothers and sisters through the paint," says former writer Ban 2 (Cooper, 2004: 31). The expressions of Ban 2 can be extended to hip-hop culture as a whole. Hip-hop has deliberately, forcefully, repeatedly and threateningly violated the rigid lines between races when it comes to behavior, attitude and politics (Neal, 2012b: 71). As kids with different ethnical, class and geographical background wear the same clothes, speak the same language, and listen to the same music, hip-hop has triumphed over America in one sense. For rappers like Chuck D and Ice-T this proved that hip-hop was the ultimate tool for cultural desegregation (Chang, 2005: 425). This position is also held by some of the hip-hop intellectuals, among them Eric K. Arnold who writes that it is "no accident that the places where hip hop has thrived internationally and in the United States tend to be large urban centers with diverse, multi-ethnic populations. (...) One reason for this might be that the freedom of expression inherent in hip hop has been somewhat of a universal language" (Arnold, 2006: 83).

However, as white Chicago artist and author William "Upski" Wimsatt has asked: What kind of desegregation allowed white kids to get away without questioning the privileges of their whiteness (Chang, 2005: 425)? Naomi Klein famously wrote that what "Cocaculturalism" first and foremost does with its focus on urban cool is feeding off the alienation at the heart of America's race relations: Selling white youth on their fetish for black style, and black youth on their fetish for white wealth (Klein, 2001: 76). The objections from Klein and Wimsatt are valid, but the fact remains that African Americans had come into a position with the power to decide trends, actions and rules in the United States' leading urban culture. No minority group in the United States has ever been able to do this. African Americans and Puerto Ricans had created a culture that has, as Tricia Rose states, "the reflexivity to create counterdominant narratives against a mobile and shifting enemy" (Rose, 2008: 27). With time, hip-hop became even more connected with blackness and African Americans, which again turned hip-hop into a culture where Puerto Ricans and other Latin Americans participated on the mercy of African Americans. That kind of power is indeed similar to the power that Irish Americans once had.

Concluding Remarks on the Theoretical Construction

Already in the transition between street gangs and hip-hop culture in the 1960s and the 1970s there are several examples of dynamics in the interethnic lives in the Northeastern part of the

United States that are concurrent with the interethnic lives in this area at the beginning of the 20th century. These comparative factors become even stronger as hip-hop culture, and its multiethnic facets and African American dominance, continues to grow and expand. This dynamic is especially illustrated by the relationship between African Americans and Puerto Ricans, which in so many ways resemble the correlations that occurred between Irish Americans and southern and eastern European immigrants. This is seen in political influences, cultural productions, panethnic foundations, Americanization, and displays of respect for the dominant ethnic group. The following part will take this “then and now” approach further, and use the Puerto Ricans in New York, and particularly the experiences of Puerto Rican DJ Charlie Chase (born Carlos Mandes), to illustrate the similarities between Irish Americans and African Americans historical positions as guides and gatekeepers for other ethnic minorities.

Puerto Ricans as Authentic Strangers: Charlie Chase as a Case in Point

In 2012, Chino XL and some of the other most prominent Latin American rappers released “Latinos Stand Up (Part 2)”, an all-star tribute to the history of Latinos in hip-hop culture. In the song B-Real is rapping that “We’re in it to win it, you can trace us from the beginnin’ /From graph on the wall to Crazy Legs on the floors spinnin’.” These lyrics give an accurate description of Latin American’s important contributions in early hip-hop culture. Rock Steady Crew, with Crazy Legs, was the dominant players in b-boying at the end of the 1970s and in the beginning of the 1980s. They were all Latino, mostly Puerto Rican, b-boys and b-girls from Manhattan, Uptown and Bronx, while their main rivals, Dynamic Rockers, were Latino b-boys/girls from Queens (Cooper, 2004: 86-87 & 96-97). The members of Rock Steady were perhaps the most visible actors in all of hip-hop in this era. They dominated their element, they toured the world, they got plenty of media coverage, and they featured in the three important films *Wild Style* (1982), *Style Wars* (1983) and *Beat Street* (1984). Mark Anthony Neal, Professor of Black Popular Culture, writes this:

In the early days of hip-hop, when it fermented in so many of New York’s black and brown (and working-class ethnic) communities, it might have been an African-American form, but there was no denying its Nuyorican flavor. Those communities were tangibly visible then, just as the organic influences of Puerto Ricans are within most contemporary understandings of hip-hop’s developing years (Neal, 2012b: 70-71).

However, Puerto Ricans' place in hip-hop was never as solid or as easily accepted as one might believe by a superficial look on the culture's history. This was especially the case in the musical part of hip-hop culture. While it is true that Puerto Ricans had an authentic place in hip-hop culture, it was disputed by many African Americans from the very beginning, or as Raquel Z. Rivera writes:

Puerto Ricans were, for the most part, welcome and active participants in hip-hop. But even during these early times, Puerto Ricans had to step lightly on hip-hop's cultural ground – particularly when it came to MCing and DJing. They were largely considered partners in creative production, although at times the bond was reduced to a junior partnership (Rivera, 2001: 237).

Furthermore, much of the connections to Latin Americans authenticity in hip-hop culture were lost with the transformation of hip-hop from folk to popular culture during the 1980s. As hip-hop culture grew in popularity and became mass culture, so did the association between hip-hop and blackness. According to Norfleet: "Hip-hop became a popular symbol of urban Black life to the wider American society, embodied by the young Black male seen as exotic, dangerous, and feared, yet simultaneously appealing and marketable" (Norfleet, 2006: 362). Puerto Ricans, as well as other Latin Americans, were eventually perceived as strangers in a culture that became more and more identified with African Americans, or as a spectator under a panel discussion held at the Ford Foundation in 2005 summarized it:

I feel like hip-hop was more multicultural in 1975 than it is in 2005, in that its diasporic roots were more acknowledged and celebrated, and in that the immigrant communities that contributed to its genesis were also acknowledged and celebrated. But when the larger corporate culture industrialized hip-hop, it became centralized not only into African American culture but the face of all African America (Tate, et al., 2006: 44).¹⁸

What has been called the "Latinization" of hip-hop occurred in the beginning of the 1990s. In the late 1980s the center of hip-hop had partly begun to move from the East to the West, as African American and Latino communities in California became important new bases for hip-hop culture and rap music (Norfleet, 2006: 365). The communities in California came with a harder style of rap music, often labeled gangster rap, with inspiration from African American toasting, Blaxploitation characters, gang life, "pimping", and Californian street culture

¹⁸ While many people argue that the industrialization of hip-hop was the main source for the lost focus on the culture's diasporic roots, an equally interesting argument is that the visibility of Latinos in hip-hop faded as rap began in the late 1980s to develop a more political focus on Black Nationalism (del Barco, 1996: 69).

(Norfleet, 2006: 365).¹⁹ At the core of the new harder style of rap music was the question of “authenticity”. This primary concern was reflected in the “common slang phrase, command, and expectation that pervaded hip-hop: ‘keep it real’” (Norfleet, 2006: 362). If an artist “kept it real” was defined not so much by how the artist conducted himself to the foundation or the historical legacy of hip-hop culture, but more by how the artist conducted oneself to a real or imaginary view of what occurred on the African American urban, male youth-oriented “street”. When the Latinization then occurred, it had few connections and paid little homage to the Puerto Rican aspects of original New York hip-hop (Flores, 2008: 37-39).

When Puerto Ricans first established themselves in hip-hop culture in South Bronx, Spanish Harlem and other parts of New York, they connected their Puerto Rican sensibilities with the American street culture that surrounded them (Neal, 2012b: 71). Like Jamaican immigrants, Puerto Ricans used a combination of scraps from the dominant culture and from their own culture in order to enter the American cultural mainstream. They introduced for instance congas and Latin percussion to reflect their large presence and influence in the communities that produced hip-hop (Norfleet, 2006: 371-372). The artists inside the Latinization-era did however not use these aspects of old school recordings in order to confirm their “authenticity”. As Juan Flores writes: “Commercialization process involves the extraction of popular culture expression from its original social context and function, it seems that the ‘Latinization’ of hip-hop has meant its distancing from the specific national and ethnic traditions to which it had most directly pertained” (Flores, 2012: 74).

Instead of highlighting the historical role of Latin Americans in hip-hop culture, these artists built their “authenticity” on ideas and experiences of street life. A way of living that is heavily connected with conceptions and misconceptions about African American urban life (Kelley: 2012). The combination of expressions founded in Latino cultures and in African American cultures was therefore different under the second wave of Latin Americans in hip-hop culture. And because there were no historical connections between the Puerto Ricans and Dominicans of the early hip-hop scene and the Chicano and Tex-Mex artists of the 1990s, it became easy to perceive Latin Americans as strangers in the culture. Hip-hop’s creation myth is for most people one of two different stories: It is either particularized as a black culture or generalized as a multicultural urban phenomenon. Neither of these mythological backgrounds allows for a sufficient inclusion of the role and dimension that Puerto Ricans played (Flores,

¹⁹ This was also a time when aspects of prison culture, in terms of language and styles of dress, became more apparent in hip-hop culture (Kitwana, 2002: 77).

2008: 32). This view provoked some of the new Latin American stars. Son Doobie (born Jason Vasquez), the Puerto Rican leader of the Los Angeles group Funkdoobiest, had this to say:

I'm up on that Latino supremacy shit. I mean, we was there from the giddyup and nobody give us funk in' no props. We perfected every funk in' art of Hip-Hop there was at the time. Whether it was breakdancing, the B-Boy shit, cazals, Lee jeans – all that stems from Latinos. Rap being a black thing, all that this year, we gonna squash that bullshit to the max (del Barco, 1996: 81).

His statement is dubious, but not completely pointless. Latin Americans lost their “authentic” place when hip-hop evolved from folk to popular culture during the 1980s, and this was a place they had already fought hard for. “We’ve lost so much of our cultural history”, said Peruvian-born graffiti writer Cristina “Dulce Love” Verán back in 1991, “Hip hop is recent history, and we can’t afford to let it go unnoticed” (del Barco, 1996: 68). Puerto Rican DJ and pioneer Charlie Chase is one of those who knows most of the distinctions and tensions between Puerto Ricans and African Americans in the early years of hip-hop. His history helps us understand why the bond between the two ethnic groups has been called a junior partnership (Rivera, 2001: 237). Interestingly, it also helps us understand why prominent Italian prizefighters once took on Irish names (Barrett and Roediger, 2004: 168).

Charlie Chase and Puerto Ricans in the Early Years of Hip-Hop

Let us quickly summarize the information so far. Puerto Ricans played an important, but somewhat forgotten part in the creation of hip-hop. They were b-boys and writers, and more rarely deejays and rappers. Over the years Puerto Ricans became more of an outsider in hip-hop-culture, despite the success of several Puerto Rican rappers. But while it is tempting to conclude that Puerto Ricans had a reverse process, from insiders to outsiders, this would partly be a false analysis because Puerto Ricans always operated inside an “African American world”. Despite Afrika Bambaataa’s warm reminiscences of interethnic solidarity and brotherhood, the story is more diverse (del Barco, 1996: 67) (George, 2012: 49). While it is true that there was a remarkable connection between the two groups in hip-hop, it is also a fact that Puerto Ricans were never fully accepted in hip-hop-culture (Rivera, 2001: 237-241) (Flores, 2008: 36). When hip-hop gradually became more synonymous with blackness during the 1980s, the position for Puerto Ricans inside hip-hop culture became even more difficult. Blackness was more the ideal, and Puerto Ricans copied and followed African Americans in

ways that we remember from the description of European immigrants encounters with Irish Americans. As the Puerto Rican rapper Puerto Rock said it in 1991: “There’s a big group of Latinos that’s into hip-hop, but most of them imitate Black style or fall into a trance. They stop hanging out with Latin people and talking Spanish” (Flores, 2012: 83).

Professor Juan Flores is right when he writes that “Latin rap first took shape as an expression of the cultural turf shared, and contended for, by African Americans and Puerto Ricans over their decades as neighbors, coworkers, and ‘homies’ in the inner-city communities” (Flores, 2012: 75). Roediger and Barrett state that the “host society was also embodied in the lived contacts that immigrants had with those who were longer established in U.S. cities” (Roediger & Barrett, 2004: 168). While Jacob Riis described the Irish American presence as inescapable for all other immigrant groups (Roediger & Barrett, 2004: 167), African Americans were often equally unavoidable for Latin Americans in the 1970s and 1980s. Although African Americans lacked the Irish’s historical dominant position in local politics, schools and unions, they dominated the graffiti, battling and cipher scenes that started to be important elements in the lives of most young people in the country’s predominantly black and Latino communities. Partly therefore, we can find Puerto Ricans embracing geographical connections to African Americans, and partly therefore inside of these urban cultures you can see Latinos following and using new African American traditions and methods for protesting against police harassment, unemployment, and economic isolation.

When James Barrett and David Roediger examined the role of the Irish in the Americanization of new immigrants in the urban United States in the early 20th century, they found out that immigrants from South and East Europe often displayed a grudging respect for Irish power.

Jewish and other boxers often took Irish professional names because of the pugnacious Irish reputation and perhaps also to minimize ethnic discrimination. “[A] majority of the Prize-fighters in New York,” Burton Hendrick noted in 1913, “are really Jews who operate under Irish names.” In Chicago, too, Jewish and Polish “pugs” took on Irish names as they entered the fight trade. Likewise, Italian gangsters in New York and Chicago took on Irish monikers (Barrett and Roediger, 2005: 9).

This name-changing phenomenon illustrates that immigrants modeled their strategies on those of the Irish (Barrett and Roediger, 2005: 9) (Roediger & Barrett, 2004: 167-168). While Irish Americans were so prominent in prizefighting that Andrea Chiariglione changed his name to Jim Flynn in order to “pass” as Irish (Barrett and Roediger, 2004: 168), Charlie Chase, one of

the first Puerto Ricans to make his mark in hip-hop, “blackened” his name to fit into the culture. While most Puerto Ricans and Latinos and Latinas concentrated on dancing and graffiti in the early years of hip-hop, Chase focused instead on deejaying (Flores, 2012: 78). As a deejay for the legendary Cold Crush Brothers, Chase witnessed the early evolution of hip-hop from the front seat. He even claims that he was the first Hispanic to become popular deejaying (Flores, 2012: 76).

In interviews, Chase has never shied away from the fact that he is Puerto Rican, or how this background has affected him. He talks openly about his history in bands doing traditional music from the island, and about how he was brought up on Latin music. But he also displays a grudging respect for African American power. Much of what Chase states in interviews proves that African Americans played a role as “Americanizers” and role models for him. First is his artist name:

I made up my name because of Grandmaster Flash (...) I first saw Flash doing this, cutting and all of this, and I saw that and I said, aw, man, I can do this, man. (...) Now “Chase” came because I’m like, damn, you need a good name, man. And Flash was on top, and I was down here. So I was chasing that niggah. I wanted to be up where he was. So I said, let’s go with Charlie Chase (Flores, 2012: 77).

Charlie being an Americanized nickname for Carlos, the story says a lot about the situation of young Puerto Ricans in the early days of rap. So does his adaption of the name Chase, as well as his embarrassment of his original name Carlos Mandes.

Whatever the origin of his Puerto Rican name, ever since he started chasing the Flash Carlos Mandes has been known by everyone, as Charlie Chase. He doesn’t even like it when “Mandes” appears on the records he wrote. “Nobody knows my name was Carlos Mandes. They laugh. They’d snap on me” (Flores, 2012: 77).

There are two reasons behind the artist’s change of name. Firstly, he apparently thinks his own name is “lame”, but the second and most important reason is that it did not fit in with what he was doing. For Chase it was difficult to be accepted as a Puerto Rican, so by Americanizing himself and taking an African American artist name, it made his whole career easier. “A lot of Blacks would not accept that I was Spanish. You know, a lot of times because of the way I played they thought I was Black”, says Chase before he mentions the main key to his success, “I became popular because of the tapes, and also because nobody could see me. Since they thought I was Black, because you know, because I was in the background” (Flores, 2012: 77). Chase’s story is not a unique one. Adaption to African

American culture had been seen prior to hip-hop in Puerto Ricans' English speech practices, but the adaption became paramount when they started to use rap nomenclature (Flores, 2008: 37). As del Barco writes:

Young Latinos had their heroes in the early, old-school rappers, not always recognizable as Latinos by the names they chose, like Prince Whipper Whip (James Whipper). Later on, the Real Roxanne (Joanne Martinez) and the Fat Boys' Prince Markie Dee (Mark Morales) increased the presence of Latino artists in the hip hop community (del Barco, 1996: 67).

Ethnic concealment became even more popular during the Latinization-era, when it became common, according to the rapper Puerto Rock, to end friendships with fellow Latin Americans in order to fit into the strict norm of hip-hop culture (Flores, 2012: 83-84).

Chase states that Hispanics are not accepted in rap, and that this is the case because to African Americans hip-hop is a "Black thing, and something that's from their roots and shit" (Flores, 2012: 77). His statement at least holds a grain of historical truth. Kembreu McLeod demonstrated for instance that race is a semantic dimension in hip-hop. A dimension that separates what is real from what is false, with black and white on each side of the scale (McLeod, 1999: 139-141).

On one hand, powerful people inside the culture emphasized hip-hop as an urban colored way of life, but on the other hand, Chase and other Latinos have far too many memories of ethnic discrimination and closed barriers. "What the fuck are you doing here, Puerto Rican?" - is something Chase and other Puerto Rican artists remember being faced with time and again (Flores, 2008: 36) (Flores, 2012: 77). Chase was also threatened with beatings and violence. It was not so much that Chase was a Puerto Rican in hip-hop, but the fact that he was a Puerto Rican out of place inside hip-hop culture. To get along in one piece, Chase emphasized his blackness, while he kept remembering that he was in fact not out of place: "I was the type of kid that you know, I always grew up with Black people. (...) My daughter's godfather is Black. (...) We all grew up in the streets, man. It's like a street thing. Once you see that the guy is cool, then you're accepted, everything flows correctly" (Flores, 2012: 78). Instead of emphasizing the natural role of Puerto Ricans in hip-hop, Chase and others highlight their personal closeness to African Americans.

Flores writes that because of the conflicting demands in hip-hop culture, "the situation of Puerto Ricans in early rap contexts was typically one of camouflage" (Flores, 2008: 36). But while Chase and so many others tried to camouflage their ethnicity and emphasized their

closeness to African Americans and blackness, Puerto Ricans and other Latinos still behaved differently from the way that southern and eastern European immigrants sometimes acted. For while Polish, Italian and Jewish youths often masked and disguised themselves entirely as Irish Americans, this was rarely done by non-African Americans in hip-hop culture. They were instead often combining small segments from their own folk culture with African American folk culture and American popular culture. Chase was one of the first to be known for this combination. Chase refused for instance to dress or have a hairstyle like the average hip-hopper. “I wanted everybody to know that I was Spanish, rocking, ripping shit up. In a Black market” (Flores, 2012: 79). But Chase also always knew that he could never be too frank about his Puerto Rican background. Such a self-presentation would, as Flores writes, “predictably brandish all the trappings of street blackness” (Flores, 2008: 36).

Concluding Remarks on the Case in Point

Chase’s blend of pulling towards and withdrawal away from African Americans and blackness is almost schizophrenic. His ambivalence exist however because the situation really is conflicting. Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics have an authentic place in hip-hop culture, but despite their roles as pioneers, especially in breaking and graffiti, they still operate inside an African American cultural setting.

For me it’s the Latin point of view. You see, what I emphasize is that I’m Hispanic in a Black world. Not just surviving but making a name for myself and leaving a big impression. Everything that happened to me was always within the Black music business, and I always was juggling stuff all of the time, because I had to be hip, I had to be a homeboy. But I also had to know how far to go without seeming like I was trying to kiss up or something, or “he’s just trying to be Black.” (...) I had to juggle that. I had to play my cards correct (Flores, 2012: 79).

The conflicting thoughts of Chase must be seen in light of the extraordinary demands for authenticity in hip-hop culture. Hip-hop has significant regional variations from one city to the other and from state to state, but the concept of authenticity is in a monotonous way almost constantly present (McLeod, 1999: 135-136). As Oliver Wang writes in his essay “Rapping and Repping Asian: Race, Authenticity, and the Asian American MC”: “Although the concept of authenticity girds most Western music cultures, from classical to pop, the idea finds its apotheosis within hip hop” (Wang, 2012: 201). An understanding of the relationship between race and authenticity in hip-hop is fundamental in order to comprehend the ways

non-African Americans affected by the culture think and act. The next chapter is consequently an analysis of ideas about race and ethnicity in hip-hop culture. How these thoughts have developed, and how these new racial ideas and politics are in direct conflict with the racial ideas and politics that are already established in the greater society.

3 Authenticity and Race in Hip-Hop Culture

Gilbert B. Rodman argues that there is a high demand for authenticity in hip-hop, compared to other music genres, because musicians who fail to be white, straight, economically privileged, and/or male are frequently and forcefully denied comparable artistic license. According to Rodman successful rappers do therefore have to “establish that they have an ‘authentic’ connection to ‘street life’ and/or ‘the hood’ and they will often justify the violent themes, drug references, and profane language in their music as honest reflections of the real-life environments from whence they came” (Rodman, 2012, 186). This is the opposite of the demands that artists in rock, folk, and country are greeted with. The dominant aesthetics of these genres also rely heavily on questions of authenticity, but nobody seriously expects that the “authenticity of the musicians in question must be read as ‘autobiography’” (Rodman, 2012: 186). The demand for authenticity in hip-hop in this writer’s opinion is a result of a much more complicated development. This is something that we will return to later, but for the time being we can agree on the fact that there is a sort of ultimatum in hip-hop, and that this demand is playing a very central role in the culture.

The inspiration behind this chapter is to a large degree found in Kembrew McLeod’s excellent quantitative study of hip-hop culture from 1999. On the height of the “keeping it real”-moment in hip-hop’s history, McLeod illustrated how hip-hop has a set of semantic dimensions that determine those who belong from those who do not belong in the culture, in other words who the authentic members are. Perhaps the two most important semantic dimensions have been the social-psychological line, between “staying true to yourself” (real) and “following mass trends / portraying yourself as somebody else” (fake), and the racial dimension with black (real) and white (fake) as the conflicting points (McLeod, 1999: 139).

How these ideas about race, ethnicity, and authenticity developed in hip-hop, and how these ideas are in direct conflict with the preexisting racial norms of the greater society will be the main focus of the following chapter. The underlying argument is that hip-hop culture connects authenticity with blackness and this association has made blackness more attractive for certain members of non-African American minorities. The second part of this chapter is an

analysis of Asian Americans in hip-hop as a case in point. This is done in order to illustrate how colored youths are expressing and conducting themselves with great racial sensitivity because of the connection between authenticity and a somewhat stereotypical conception of blackness.

The Conflicting Ideas of Charlie Chase

Authenticity is of course partly hype (Judy, 2012: 112). It is an attempt to reduce a complex and diverse culture into an identifiable and homogeneous one (Kelley, 2012: 138-139). But given the hostile environment that has been, and to a certain degree still is, surrounding hip-hop, it is not surprising that the culture contains so strong demands for authenticity. On a question of why rap music is not respected as an adequate form of art, the rapper Nas (born Nasir Jones) invokes both aspects of being black in the United States, and the blackness of hip-hop culture, before he connects these racial aspects with the importance of staying true to yourself and the culture that you are part of:

(Hip-hop is) Threatening. We are not supposed to be thinking like this. We are not supposed to be talking like this. What are we doing proud of how we talking with this broken English. How the fuck are we making poetry out of this broken English? Why are you guys bringing street conversation to the mainstream world? Stay in your place. Stay out of here. I don't like looking at you. Fix your pants, fix your hat. You are supposed to stay in the gutter, get out of here! What are you doing invading my home? Why are my kids liking your music? What's going on? I don't like you! (...) That is why... I am a grown man now. I have no business wearing saggy jeans. No business at all. But, I might let it sag a little bit just to annoy a few stiff motherfuckers, just because that is what got me here, and I always going to stay true to that (*Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap*, 2012).

Many people in hip-hop feel that the culture is too often singled out as the scapegoat for declining American values, despite its positive contributions to American life and culture (Kitwana, 2005: 19) (Baldwin, 2012: 229). Hip-hop is in principle a culture that is open for everyone. It has multiculturalism as part of its foundation, and its development brought with it new ideas on racial politics and identities (Kitwana, 2005: 23-51) (Tate, et al., 2006: 33-34). However, hip-hop is also marked by the old racial politics of the United States. And mainly because it has encountered so much, often deserved criticism, hip-hop has developed into a culture that can be defensive, self-centered and discriminating (Baldwin, 2012: 229-232). A combination of cultural biases, a reaction to four decades of criticism, and the reminding

strengths of the old racial ideas in the United States create in other words the semantic dimensions that are found in hip-hop culture (Kitwana, 2005: 19) (Rodman, 2012: 183-186).²⁰

It is thus no wonder that the connection between authenticity and blackness has such a strong position in hip-hop culture. This correlation has developed heavily over the years, but it has always existed. According to journalist Bill Adler, Run-D.M.C., arguably the first superstars of rap music, broke through to the mainstream because their promoter Russell Simmons said that, “I’m not going to water it down. I’m not going to whiten it up. This is going to be pure and uncut. This is what these young Black kids are bringing to the party” (Bradley and DuBois, 2010: 121). From the beginning, realness was a synonym for blackness, and fake was the same as “whiten something up”.

No matter how one feels about the constant demands for authenticity, the “keep it real”-doctrine is a set of rules that most participators inside of hip-hop culture have felt obliged to live by. Because inauthenticity is, as Baz Dreisinger writes, hip-hop’s cardinal sin (Dreisinger, 2008: 132). So when Charlie Chase said that he was constantly juggling between being a “homeboy” and not giving people reasons to say that he was trying to be black, this is the same as when African American artists, like Method Man or Spice 1, say that they represent who they are in actuality to the best of their ability (Flores, 2012: 79) (McLeod, 1999: 140). Any non-black artist who portrays himself as black will get into trouble because of the social-psychological measurement of authenticity. Consequently, it is unthinkable that any Latin American artist would make a general attempt to pass as a black person.

A non-black artist who seeks authenticity must be self-consciously Latino, Asian or white. Dreisinger claims that non-black hip-hoppers “see their music as their race and as a kind of cultural glue which holds them together, defining them as people and as musicians” (Dreisinger, 2008: 119). This is partly true, because non-black rappers have often embraced ideas of less rigid racial lines, the human race and a colorblind “hip-hop nation” (Wang, 2012: 208-215). Nonetheless, if we analyze the textual material of non-black rappers, we will soon find out that these artists are frequently very sensitive about race, ethnicity, and about how they fit into a predominantly black culture.

²⁰ “Cultural biases” is here referring to Rodman’s definition of biases that “rests on the prejudicial notion that ‘some people’ are wholly incapable of higher thinking and artistic creativity – and that their ability to create ‘fiction’ is limited to making minor modifications to their otherwise unvarnished personal experiences. In this case, those ‘some people’ are rappers – which is, in turn, a thinly disguised code for ‘African Americans’ in general” (Rodman: 2012: 186).

According to a 2010 study, there can be benefits, such as “fitting in” or avoiding stigmatizations, of passing as black in certain parts of American society (Khanna and Johnson, 2010: 387 & 390-392). The small, but growing literature on Puerto Ricans in hip-hop has several examples of artists who meet obstacles because they are not black enough. Charlie Chase is one example on this subject; Rachel Raimist is another. Raimist is a filmmaker who directed the hip-hop documentary *Nobody Knows My Name* (1999), and she is often invited to speak during Black History Month because of this. When understanding that she is a light-skinned Puerto Rican, conference organizers often retract their invitations (Basu and Harris, 2006: 64). It would be logical to conclude that in hip-hop there could be benefits of “passing” in one form or another if one only pays attention to the racial semantic dimension. However, there are hardly any non-black artists in the predominantly black medium of hip-hop who tries to pass as black.²¹ A non-black kid engaging in the culture is going to be deemed cool by his peers if he can pull it off, but, as Kitwana writes, “by doing so, however, that kid is not choosing race suicide” (Kitwana, 2005: 15). Instead, racially different artists such as Eminem, Beastie Boys, Drake, The Mountain Brothers, and Cypress Hill have all been praised for making art concentrated on their own feelings of self. They are selling whiteness, Jewishness or latinidad.²² But they have at the same time often juggled their identities between blackness and something else by highlighting cultural symbols (clothes/dress and language) that are associated with blackness. Or to put it in another way, a growing number of non-black Americans have entered the 21st century by wearing some popular conceptions of blackness (Dreisinger, 2008: 121).

²¹ There are however several examples of rappers who are both African and Latin Americans, and who chooses to emphasize their blackness for several reasons. They can choose such an emphasis as a reaction to how they feel categorized by society, they can do so because of a historical memory of oppression, or they can do so because the dominant norm of hip-hop culture is black. See for instance Chino XL, a half-African American, half-Puerto Rican MC who has rhymed several times about the difficulties of growing up with a mixed ethnicity. This is perhaps best seen in the song “What Am I?” (1996). See also “The Urban Daily Staff URL 2011).

²² Eminem was praised by critics for the song “White America” (2002), in which the artist spoke about his whiteness and how that has affected his position in mainstream America. The following rhyme is an example: “Look at these eyes, baby blue, baby just like yourself / If they were brown Shady lose, Shady sits on the shelf / But Shady’s cute, Shady knew Shady’s dimples would help / Make ladies swoon baby (ooh baby!). Look at my sales / Let’s do the math: If I was black, I woulda sold half / I ain’t have to graduate from Lincoln High School to know that.” Eminem again was heavily influenced by Beastie Boys, a group who, according to Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, had developed “personas that presaged the nihilism later perfected by gangsta rappers, as well as the ‘crazy white guy’ position” (Bradley and DuBois, 2010: 130). Drake, currently one of the biggest stars in hip-hop, is the son of an African American father and a white and Jewish Canadian mother. In the music video “HYFR (Hell Ya Fucking Right)” (2012), Drake is actively using the surroundings of his Bar Mitzvah as a spatial representation connected to himself. The Mountain Brothers, consisting of three Chinese American rappers, made the song “Invisible Man” (1996), in which they discusses how they do not exist within a black-white racial spectrum (Wang, 2012: 207). Cypress Hill’s use of their Latino background can be seen in songs such as “Latin Lingo” (1991).

Take for instance the use of so-called Black English, which is often thought of as a speech associated with the creative slang in rap music. But Black English is much more, it is also syntax, grammar, accents and tone (Kelley, 2006: xiv). One example can be found in one of the most distinct characteristics of African American culture: The pattern of “call and response”.²³ “Call and response” is seen in all forms of African American music, from jazz and blues to gospel, go-go and hip-hop. In the latter, the peculiarity can perhaps most clearly be observed in the works of Public Enemy. In the group, vocalist Chuck D is doing the calling, and the hype-man and second vocalist Flavor Flav is responding. This was one of the main inspirational sources for the Latin American group Cypress Hill, who structured their group after Public Enemy and the African American tradition of “call-and-response” (*Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap*, 2012.).²⁴ Therefore, even if one sold latinidad or whiteness, the artistry and the style of the artists were always a combination of popular characteristics of blackness and something else. These combinations were always done very clearly, with self-weighted emphasizes on the use and respect for African American traditions.

The Culture of Race

Latino or Asian hip-hoppers may speak with conscience on their ethnic or racial otherness, but if they speak out too much about their experiences as racialized beings, they will be running, as Asian American rapper Kikou Nishi puts it, the risk of casting themselves as “too far out there” (Wang, 2012: 211). While one could never be too black in hip-hop, one can certainly be too Asian. Now, a great majority of Latino, Asian and white hip-hoppers will never fully attempt to “pass” as blacks, but they are doing something else that is very interesting: These actors are namely most often portraying themselves as a person that is

²³ Literature on this subject includes Patricia Liggin Hill’s *Call & Response – The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition* (1998) Her anthology is a good example of literature that traces “call and response” as a pattern through all of African American history.

²⁴ Usually “call and response” is an artistic device in which the artist calls and the audience responds, which is perhaps best seen in gospel settings. This is also the case in rap music, but rap groups have also commonly an established call and response-dynamic inside the group. In Public Enemy, it is Flavor Flav’s role to confirm the words of Chuck D, the group’s preacher. In the hit-song “Fight the Power” (1989) Chuck D is calling out the Eurocentric nature of the United States’ mainstream culture with the following rhyme, “Elvis was a hero to most / But he never meant shit to me / Straight up racist, the sucker was / Simple and plain”, while Flavor Flav is responding with a concluding line, “Motherfuck him and John Wayne!” Cypress Hill used this dynamic in the construction of their group, with B-Real as the caller and Sen Dog as the responder. This is seen in numerous songs by the group, for instance in “Real Estate” (1991) where Sen Dog is responding to B-Real’s calls of masculinity and roughness.

“almost black” and as a group that are close to blackness. This is in line with Charlie Chase’s mixing of identities (Flores, 2012: 79), or the rapper Q-Unique’s resistance of Puerto Ricans being labeled as a different set of artists. All this is highly understandable if one looks at the combination of social-psychological and racial measurements of authenticity, and the equating of blackness and coolness in the new America (McLeod, 1999: 140-141) (Kitwana, 2005: 15) (Rivera, 2001: 235-237).

McLeod analyzed textual discussions on hip-hop, interviews with rappers and lyrics of rap songs, and came to the conclusion that black symbolizes real and white symbolizes fake. The racial hierarchy of hip-hop can alternatively be summarized with the opening lines of Mos Def’s song “Mathematics” (1999): “Beats by Su-Primo / For all my people / Negroes and Latinos / And even the gringos.” While explicit anti-white and anti-Asian sentiments are rare in hip-hop, pro-black statements are common. Hip-hop has a racial history and politics that makes it nearly impossible to be too black (Wang, 2012: 209). Take for instance the lyrics of Common’s song “In My Own World” (1994), which includes the following lines: “I love black thighs, you sisters better realize / The real hair and real eyes get real guys.” Authenticity is here identified as having black traits and the real guys are implicitly black like the artist himself.²⁵ Now, if a rapper disassociates himself from “blackness” then that artist is also opening himself or herself up to charges of selling out (McLeod, 1999: 141).

Of course, the idea of blackness that is presented is only a mythological idea.²⁶ This cultural mythology equates whiteness with middleclass and blackness with the underclass. This is partly why the racial dimension correlates with two of McLeod’s other dimensions, namely the political-economic and the social-locational measurements of authenticity. These dimensions connect because there are strong relations between class and race in the United States (Rodman, 2012: 189). As Rodman writes:

²⁵ Gregory Stephens came to a similar conclusion when he examined interracial dialogue in rap music. He concluded that the genre often had Afrocentric visions, but rarely combined it with anti-white sentiments (Stephens, 1992: 67-71). Stephens refers to the artist Ice Cube and the two groups Brand Nubian and X-Clan as some of the actors that combined Black Nationalism with ideas of racial superiority (Stephens, 1992: 68-69). On the song “Brand Nubian” (1989) the group Brand Nubian has the following rhymes: “We come to make people aware that black means first / 4000 years we’ve been made to feel cursed / But now, it’s our time to rule,” and “To put it exact, dominant means Black / But some have a hard time tryin’ to swallow that / Now we have some that are fake / Wearing blue eyes and green eyes, come on gimme a break.”

²⁶ The reference is here to the traditional presentation of blackness in hip-hop. As this writer has previously argued, the representations of blackness have to a certain degree changed over the last years. For more on this discussion see the essay “Why did Dystopic Images of Spatial Representation Disappear from Rap Music Videos?” (Aahlin, 2012).

Although people of color still remain far more likely to be poor than Whites are, the vast majority (68%) of the people living below the poverty line are White. That's certainly not the face of poverty one is typically shown by the mainstream media, however, which prefers to pretend that Whiteness and affluence go hand in hand (Rodman, 2012: 193).

In the essay "Eminem: The New White Negro", Carl Hancock Rux claims that a white artist like Eminem was "socialized as black, in the proverbial hood" (Rux, 2003). The writer connects Eminem with blackness because he lived under the poverty line in a city, Detroit, dominated by African Americans. As Rux concludes "the new White Negro has not arrived at black culture... he was born into it" (Rux, 2003). But if he was right in claiming this conclusion, it is only because of the strong correlations between race and class, poverty and the hood, and the hood and hip-hop in American culture (Rodman, 2012: 189). With black being so close to the concept of the "hood" and the social construction of the underclass, the different demands for authenticity become attached to each other. That is why an artist like Vanilla Ice, a white rapper who made highly commercialized music, tried his best to portray himself as a man coming from a hard-luck childhood.²⁷ This was done with the purpose of getting more "ghetto credibility", or in other words being closer to the stereotypical conceptions of blackness. His career was beyond redemption as soon as the public found out that his background was invented. Not only had he failed to "keep it real", he also had a racial and a class/geographical background that were considered oppositional to blackness and thereby contrary to authenticity (Wang, 2012: 201 & 218) (Rux, 2003) (Stephens, 1992: 72).

Black artists have also opened themselves up to charges of selling out by distancing themselves from blackness. Rappers, who have disconnected themselves from blackness, have sometimes done this consciously, and at other times involuntarily. Big Daddy Kane, Black Eyed Peas, Lil Flip, Kanye West, Murs and Will Smith are just some the black artists who have been accused of acting or behaving too white. Because blackness is a stereotypical concept, it is also connected with all the other aspects of authentic hip-hop. Some conservative pundits, like Thomas Sowell and Dr. Anthony Bradley, claim that black people in hip-hop are being accused of "acting white" because they "speak understandable English, pursue learning and have racially integrated lives" (Bradley URL 2005) (Sowell, 2005: 52-59). This is quite simply not correct. The multifaceted nature of hip-hop is a direct contradiction to these claims. The rapper Slick Rick spoke the King's English like no other

²⁷ This is for instance seen in the song "Scars" (1998), in which Vanilla Ice performs the following rhyme: "Broken families that always got pain / I break the chain, refuse to be the same / Mother! You did as good as you could / After all the abuse I still understood."

artist before him, Boogie Down Productions popularized the term *edutainment*, and Run-D.M.C. did arguably more for desegregation in the 1980s than most politicians or intellectuals ever managed.²⁸ Yet, none of these artists is being called sellouts or being accused of acting white; they are instead amongst the most respected names in hip-hop's history.

So what is exactly considered "acting white" in hip-hop? And why is the term connected with the idea of "selling out"? These terms are not counterproductive dimensions, as Sowell argues, but rather accusations connected with the culture's imperatives of authenticity being tied to both its representations of African American identity and African American folk culture. As Darryl Pinckney puts it, hip-hop "told young black men that success could be a kind of militancy and that it did not mean you had to act white or give up any of your yo dog whassup. (...) Blackness was portable" (Pinckney, 2012: 36). Alternatively, as the rapper Mos Def (born Dante Terrell Smith) said it: "Hip Hop is always beautiful because it challenges America's notion of what they believe young and disfranchised people to be. These people, us, who are supposed to be the bottom of society, who are supposed to not know anything, who don't have like one good idea, come up with breaking" (Cooper, 2004: 109). Moving your arts away, and then towards whiter pop-music types of sounds and aesthetics can be labeled "selling out".²⁹ Appealing to the mainstream without considerations for the culture's demand for authenticity is therefore considered "acting white" or "selling out", and this is the case behind the claims that artists like Will Smith, Black Eyed Peas, and Nicki Minaj have distanced themselves from blackness.

²⁸ For Slick Rick's use of the language, see how the British-Jamaican immigrant used, and played with, his vocabulary, different accents, and how he punctuates every word and rhyme on the album *The Great Adventures of Slick Rick* (1988/2000). For Boogie Down Productions' reinvention of the term "edutainment," see how the rapper KRS-One emphasizes a combination of entertainment and education in the concept and the lyrics on the album *Edutainment* (1990). By arguing that Run-D.M.C. had such a strong desegregational position in the United States' society, I am referring to Run-D.M.C.'s ability to integrate elements of popular culture that were considered white into their music and style. Their music, and especially their cover of Aerosmiths' "Walk This Way" (1986/1999), and the accompanying music video, undoubtedly helped black music to be played on MTV and on mainstream radio-channels.

²⁹ A bit beside the point, but fascinating to note is the fact that the accusations of "selling out" have for the last years been loudest in underground spaces that have audiences dominated by white people. This becomes problematic because selling out is here often a concept that is applied to artists of color that operate within the underground, but who have different creative visions or ideas that do not fit into what their white fanbase expects "real" hip-hop to be. Artists, who choose dystopic images of spatial representation to orient their own places in the world, like a Californian gangster rapper, are then being described as "fake" mainstream hip-hop, while certain white MCs, for instance the Minneapolis rappers Brother Ali and Slug, are being described as real hip-hop mostly because they are what the audience wants them to be (Ofiwe URL 2012). "One of the hardest things we're dealing with now is the underlying feeling of white supremacy among fans who feel they are a part of hip-hop, but are listening to and prefer mostly white MCs," said Brother Ali himself in 2005 (Kitwana URL 2005).

Interestingly, one of the first groups to be labeled as sell-outs was Cypress Hill, a non-black trio from Los Angeles. When the group emerged on the scene, they managed to get played both in the streets and in the white suburbs. Their self-titled debut album, *Cypress Hill* (1991), became one of the biggest selling and most respected records in the history of rap music. Consequently, Cypress Hill quickly got criticized for being too Anglocentric. Ed Morales of *The Village Voice* for instance assumed that because two of its three members were Latinos, the group had to conform to a certain style of latinidad (Rivera, 2001: 247). Being criticized for not being Latin enough was something that the group could easily manage. However, it became much worse when the group was accused of distancing themselves from the authentic black features of hip-hop. With their follow-up album, *Black Sunday* (1993), Elliott Wilson of the underground rap magazine *ego trip*, wrote in 1995 that, “it’s hard to maintain balance on the tightrope between street credibility and commercial acceptance. Something’s got to give. And in Cypress’ case they fell hard on the commercial side – to the tune of three million units sold of their follow-up, *Black Sunday* – while their hardcore fan base ignored them” (Wilson URL 2010). And this quotation was part of Elliott Wilson’s journalistic defense of Cypress Hill! Major rap magazine *The Source* had another, much less diplomatic approach to the group’s dominant white fanbase:

News Flash!

In the hopes of saving their rapidly deteriorating street credibility Cypress Hill and the entire Soul Assassins family have announced their plans for an African-American fan registration drive. For a limited time only, every Black person who can be convinced to go to one of their concerts will be given \$5,000 in cash and prizes of \$250 will also be awarded to Caucasian fans showing up in blackface. – *The Source*, January 1994 (Wilson URL 2010).

In interviews at the time, Cypress Hill scoffed at the accusations of being “sell outs”. They emphasized that they made music that was real to them, that they refused to be boxed into any category, and that they all had authentic backgrounds (Rivera, 2001: 247). However, it was apparent that the group found the criticism troubling, something they also later admitted (DJ Muggs, personal communication, 2007). Soon after the accusations of “selling out” came, Cypress Hill quickly dropped the white hip-hop group House of Pain from their Soul Assassins roster, according to the group because they did not “represent correctly” (Wilson URL 2010) (McLeod, 1999: 139&143).³⁰

³⁰ It is easy to see how Cypress Hill connects conceptions of whiteness with inauthenticity in their arguments for dropping House of Pain. The group was seemingly dropped because they wore “tight leather pants,” used elements of rock and roll in their music, and generally failed to represent authentically (Wilson URL 2010).

The case of Cypress Hill illustrates several aspects of the link between race and authenticity in the mid-1990s hip-hop scene. It tells us that more than a decade after Charlie Chase had to juggle his identities; Cypress Hill still had to perform the exact same acts. This illustrates the strength of the continued connections between race and authenticity in hip-hop. It also shows how Latin Americans were placed between the real and fake sides in the racial hierarchy of hip-hop culture, which will be analyzed much more thoroughly later.

There are justified reasons for the almost paranoid dimension of hip-hop; the demand for authenticity. This thesis have pointed out some of them, but the culture's suspicion of outsiders can perhaps best be summarized with a few sentences from Greg Tate's essay "Hip-hop Turns 30: Whatcha Celebratin' For?":

Hip-hop may have begun as a folk culture, defined by its isolation from mainstream society, but being that it was formed within the American that gave us the coon show, its folksiness was born to be bled once it began entertaining the same mainstream that had once excluded its originators (Tate, 2012: 64).

But, despite the understandable logic in hip-hop's defensive behavior, and regardless of the fact that the culture is more varied and intellectual than what Sowell and Dr. Bradley claim, criticizing the connections between race and hip-hop are far from pointless. The downside of the constant demands for authenticity and the homogenization of blackness are very serious factors of hip-hop culture. If hip-hop has become the dominant face of black America, then blackness, which of course in reality consists of 400 years of history and a truly incredible wide collection of cultural expressions, are tremendously reduced.³¹ As the British author Zadie Smith complained about the American doctrine of authenticity, "Fail to keep it real there and you'd never see your Blackness again" (Smith URL 2009). For Smith, the "keep it real" instructions became a prison cell. The connections between race and class in the United States lead the author to feel "that someone else can rush in and define you when you least expect it, making you being black part of an idea of blackness far outside yourself" (Pinckney, 2012: 35).

It should be noted that hip-hop has never allowed only one type of black aesthetic to blossom. As the rapper Common expressed it: "You have to remember that hip-hop had De La Soul, Kwamè, NWA, Compton's Most Wanted, the Geto Boys, Rakim, Slick Rick – it was never one thing" (Bradley & DuBois, 2010: 326). After hip-hop however went mainstream,

³¹ Anthropologist Marc D. Perry for instance writes that "hip hop today has emerged as the most visible and widely disseminated conduit of U.S. black popular imagery globally" (Perry, 2012: 295).

there is no denying that often one type of sound and style has dominated the culture. For a period in the 1990s and the 2000s, this dominant style was a mixture of gangster aesthetic, violence, and sexual bravado (Bradley & DuBois, 325-326). The branding, homogenization, and stagnation create a culture where a part of the audience, which is multiracial, from time to time attempts to limit the artists in terms of artistry, aesthetics and styles. These attempts are often based on puritan perceptions of hip-hop culture and stereotypical perceptions of blackness and African Americans. The audience can for instance state that the music is not real enough, because it includes singing, elements of modern rock music, or is featuring white artists. Alternatively, the audience can claim that the artist is not real enough, because he is not sufficiently hard, heterosexual or “hood”. Such attempts can naturally hinder artistic freedom, honest reflections and orientation of the artists own individual sense of self, and it can hold back a multilayered presentation that respects the variation and complexity of African Americans and blackness.

Consequently, a great number of artists have challenged the demands for authenticity. Rappers like Common and Murs have knowingly confronted the demands for “hardness” in hip-hop, while artists like Kanye West have challenged the demands for a “hood”-background in the culture. They have as a result all been accused of acting white. These artists have kept the concept of a unified black voice, while they at the same time have refused to restrict or homogenize the concept of blackness. This is for instance seen throughout the Kanye West-album *808s & Heartbreak* (2008), and in the lyrics to his song “Everything I Am” (2007). In the song West first connects beauty with being light-skinned, a relation commonly invoked in popular culture and by mainstream media, then he connects hardness and street culture with blackness, which is a relation often attached to each other in hip-hop: “I never be picture perfect Beyoncé / Be light as Al B. or black as Chauncey / Remember him from Blackstreet, he was black as the street was”. Before he dismisses both connections by charging that “street culture”, as it is sometimes presented in rap music, is awful, and certainly not part of a life that should be glorified: “I know that people wouldn’t usually rap this / But I got the facts to back this / Just last year, Chicago had over 600 caskets / Man, killing’s some wack shit / Oh, I forgot, except for when niggas is rapping / Do you know what it feels like when people is passing?”

Murs does something similar in the song “And this is for...” (2004). First he attacks the limits that hip-hop culture can put on black youths: “Contrary to what the legendary B.I.G. had to say / You don’t have to sell drugs or make the NBA / It’s easy to get a grant and get an

MBA / To achieve one goal there's more than one way / Young people on the whole we have lost our way".³² The song is however not just the typical critique of stereotypical conceptions of blackness, because the lyrics keep changing directions. The next verse of the song connects again being black with being hip-hop and vice versa:

My culture's not a trend, being black is not in / But for you it's just a phase you're gonna have to transcend / While even if I tried, I could never blend in / To society's mainstream, American dream / Yeah, it's all one love, but remember one thing / This music is my life, not a cultural fling / It's an expression of the soul when we dance and sing / And you are blessed to have a chance to even glance the scene.

Murs has now used the first verse to attack the current aesthetics of blackness in hip-hop, the second verse to create his authentic connection with the culture, and then in the last verse he explains how his alternative portrayals of blackness has gradually alienated him from a black audience:

Man I do the same music, they stop coming to shows / It's like they scared of the white boys in the front row / First I was like 'So?' I'mma get my dough / But the number kept falling as my fan base would grow / And now I'm concerned so I gotta speak up / First the money was the only thing shutting me up / But now I don't care, don't support me, get mad / Why wouldn't you abort me, my own people have.³³

The quotations from Kanye West and Murs are strong statements on the pigeonhole hip-hop culture can create for black people. That is not to say that being an intelligent and well-spoken person is seen as something negative inside of the culture, historically it is rather the opposite. Nevertheless, the blackness that is promoted by hip-hop, has for the last two decades been "productionalized". Such blackness can be attractive, especially for young people that struggles inbetween the dividing color lines. According to Carl Hancock Rux, the new black male is in hip-hop culture presented as a "dream borrowed from our own history of slavery and Black Panthers, Black Arts Movement poets and pimps, and Blaxploitation superheroes as well as the oppressor's icon of cowboys, gangsters, and comic book superheroes" (Rux, 2003). Who would not be attracted to something like that?

The new power brokers of culture had to inherit an inherited concept of race, and form vaguely similar ways of seeing the construct of race. If the culture of race in

³² Murs is here referring to the artist The Notorious B.I.G., who in the song "Things Done Changed" (1994) performed the following rhyme: "If I wasn't in the rap game / I'd probably have a ki knee-deep in the crack game / 'Cause the streets is a short stop / Either you slingin' crack rock or you got a wicked jump shot."

³³ Murs have later played with the ideas of authenticity several times. See for instance the film clip *Murs and Tabi Boone are Besties* (2012).

America could mean more to the new generation than the sociopolitical, economic, and physiological history of race in America, the new product on the American cultural market – could be race itself (Rux, 2003).

The words from Rux are well worth considering. Is blackness a new cultural product, and is there really a new culture of race in the United States?

Unity in Hip-Hop Culture: Panethnicity Based on Authenticity

The attractiveness of blackness and African America is in other words based on a popularization of black culture. It is also a blackness that in some ways is connected to an attractive history of political and cultural resistance. There are, as Kelley writes,

Historical and political reasons why the ghettos of North America and African Americans continues to loom so large in the imaginations of hip hoppers all over the globe. Black America's inner cities have been perceived by aggrieved populations as sites of resistance. (...) African-American popular culture was embraced from Brazil, to South Africa to Ghana as a source of inspiration and liberation (Kelley, 2006: xv).

It is true that hip-hop groups and artists like Public Enemy, Jungle Brothers, Paris, and Queen Latifah have been seen as models of liberatory politics, and this is one factor behind the attractive features of the new blackness (Arnold, 2006: 83). The other aspect is that hip-hop is in addition mass-marketed products that connect coolness and fantastical heroism with blackness. This is a black culture in which the appealing effects on members of other minorities should be relatively easy to understand. For with all the emphasis on “realness” being connected with blackness is it only reasonable to believe that people inbetween the dividing color lines of the American society, American hip-hop, and the old and new racial politics are pulled towards blackness. This is seen in actions taken by non-black hip-hoppers, something that is especially well illustrated by Latin Americans, but also minority youths that are hardly connected with African Americans, like the Hmong people and Arab Americans, are reportedly adopting styles of dress and speech associated with African American urban youth.³⁴

³⁴ For examples of African American influences on the Hmong people see Stacey J. Lee's *Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth*. Lee states that “many second-generation Hmong American students adopted hip-hop styles of dress and speech, which mainstream educators and the students themselves associated with African American urban youth. Indeed, these students adopted hip-hop aesthetic because they viewed hip-hop as expressing a critique of racial and class inequality. Furthermore, these students identified more with the status of African American students than with middle-class white students at the school” (Lee, 2009: 130-131). For an example of African American influences on Arab Americans, see

But young non-black minorities in hip-hop culture are not only actively pushing towards African Americans, they are also being pulled into the culture by internal and external factors. Externally by facing discrimination in the larger society, and internally by African Americans that push for a non-white panethnicity. Journalists like Davey D, intellectuals like Robin Kelley, and artists like Ice Cube have all claimed a non-white panethnicity in hip-hop culture through panels, writings and songs (Basu and Harris, 2006 :64) (Kelley, 2006: xii) (Warren G “Get U Down Part 2” 2005).

A case in point is the artist 2Pac, who combined anti-white sentiments with pro-black and brown statements in several songs. In “Last Wordz” (1993) he raps that “United we stand divided we fall / They can shoot one nigga, but they can’t take us all / Let’s get along with the Mexicans / And we can all have peace on the sets again / Imagine that if it took place / Keeping the smile off their white faces”, while the song “Po Nigga Blues” (2004) includes the following lyrics:

To my brothers in the barrio, you livin’ worse than the niggas in the ghetto, so / I give a fuck about your language or complexion / You got love for the niggas in my section / You got problems with the punk police? / Don’t run from the chumps, get the pump from me / We ain’t free, I’ll be damned if I played a trick / For a blonde haired blue eyed Caucasian bitch (2Pac, 2004: “Po Nigga Blues”).

Oliver Wang writes that since “Rapper’s Delight” came out in 1979 “most aspiring hip hop artists have sought to tap into as wide an audience as they can” (Wang, 2012: 207). A considerable numbers of African American rappers have, for personal, political or marketable reasons, nonetheless actively attempted through their lyrics and other actions to limit their audiences. They have used a slightly wider definition of W.E.B. Du Boi’s well-known perspective on African American culture as something made for, by, and about African Americans (Wang, 2012: 206). The intended public has then been an all-black, or a non-white audience. The extreme example of this is Ice Cube’s *Death Certificate* (1991), a controversial album that intentionally was supposed to speak to the black man, while it violently criticized everybody else.³⁵ The “black man” of *Death Certificate* included Latino males, but opposed whites, Asians, Jews, females and any other people that were considered fake in accordance to the semantic dimensions of hip-hop (Chang, 2005: 330-353) (Davis and Ice Cube, 1992).

Dinitia Smith’s “Arab-American Writers, Uneasy in Two Worlds; Immigrant Authors Feel Added Burdens Since 9/11”. In the piece, the Palestinian-American poet Suheir Hammad states inter alia that “I grew up around rhymes and break dance. Those of us who weren’t Puerto Rican created our own minority group. Asians, blacks, Caribbeans, we were all the minority” (Smith URL 2003).

³⁵ The album became of course a massive hit-record in white, middleclass suburbia, but that is another story.

Different African American artists have over the years created, described, and directed themselves towards a specific panethnic group consisting of blacks and Latinos. This panethnicity has been based on common experiences of poverty and common experiences of oppression from the police, the government, the military and the health care system. It has also now and then used historical myths.³⁶

African American Culture and the Inbetweenness of Latin Americans

When African American hip-hop artists like 2Pac rhymes “It would not be L.A. without the Mexicans / black pride, brown love and we are on the sets again” (“To Live & Die in L.A.” 1996), this is an acceptance of *latinidad* as an authentic part of hip-hop and street culture. As Raquel Z. Rivera argues, Puerto Ricans in New York have not been assimilated into African Americanness, but eventually been “legitimated through the invocation of an urban-class-based, and Afro-diasporic shared identity that serves as the base from which to name hip hop ‘Black and Puerto Rican’, ‘Black and Latino,’ an expression of ghetto-based ‘people of color’ and/or ‘niggas’” (Rivera, 2003: 186). The Los Angeles riots in 1992 and the cultural reactions that followed it had the same, shared identity that Rivera has described as the urban-class-based identity of New York: Firstly, the explosions of Los Angeles’ multiracial poor, and then the collective efforts of African and Latin American artists to address the situation and problems of inner-city youths. The Latin American band War used MacArthur Park, one of the central places in the uprisings, as a concert venue shortly after the riots. Los Angeles-based Chicano rappers Kid Frost, A Lighter Shade of Brown, and Proper Dos got together with African American rappers, like 2Pac and Ice-T, and made the protest-album *Rap Declares War* (1992), which calls for social justice and uses samples of classic War songs. Meanwhile the Multiethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network (MIWON) started to coordinate an annular march on MacArthur Park (Alvarez and Widener, 2012: 226-233). Even as the riots illustrated conflicts between African Americans and Latinos, there were also

³⁶ Artists that have talked specifically to African American and Latin American listeners on these grounds includes performers as difference as the gangster rapper W.C., alternative M.C.s J-Zone, Canibus, and Bushwick Bill, and conscious rappers Talib Kweli and The Last Emperor. See The S.T.O.P. Movement (2004: “Dear Mr. President”), J-Zone (1998/2000: “Inauguration Day”), Canibus (1998: “Aids is Gold, HIV is Platinum”), Geto Boys (1993: “Crooked Officer”), Reflection Eternal (2000: “The Human Element”) and The Last Emperor (1997: “Monumental”).

lots of examples of a new shared identity established on “an expression of ghetto-based “people of color”” (Rivera, 2003: 186) (Camarillo, 2004).

Rivera’s arguments on how Puerto Ricans had to negotiate their position in hip-hop is similar to Juan Flores’ description of Latin rap as a phenomenon that “first took shape as an expression of the cultural turf shared, and contended for, by African Americans and Puerto Ricans over their decades as neighbors, coworkers, and ‘homies’ in the inner-city communities” (Flores, 2012: 75). Puerto Ricans have, according to Rivera, “constructed their identities, participated and created art through a process of negotiation with the dominant notions of Blackness and *latinidad*” (Wang, 2012: 202). The host society is in other words still “embodied in the lived contacts that immigrants had with those who were longer established in U.S. cities”, in the same way as it was a century ago (Roediger & Barrett, 2004: 168). Puerto Ricans in New York’s hip-hop scene have not distanced themselves from blackness, as would be the logical step if they learned about U.S. style racism, from the “host society” (Roediger & Barrett, 2004: 168). Instead, Puerto Ricans have “sought to acknowledge their Afro-diasporic Caribbeanness without wholly submerging themselves under the reigning Hispanocentric definition of *latinidad* as nonblack, or under a Blackness that takes only African Americans into account” (Wang, 2012: 202). These calls for a broader identity can be heard far outside of New York’s border. As Philip Kasinitz writes:

If there is any hope for deconstructing America’s pernicious racial categories, it may lie in the daily life practices of the large number of young people (...) now growing up in multi-ethnic neighborhoods and cities with no clear racial majority. (...) Thus as we think about race and the new second generation, it behooves us to pay close attention to the popular culture these young people are creating. In the end that culture may prove far more fluid and dynamic than the advocates of renewed assimilation recognize, and less corrosive than the predictors of segmentation and second-generation decline now fear (Kasinitz, 2004: 293).

It seems evident that the traditional color line of the United States feels insufficient for the new second-generation. Their popular cultures are consequently equipping us to overturn the old racial paradigms (Kitwana, 2005: 162). The irony of hip-hop is that while the culture is rooted in new racial ideas and can be used as a tool for new racial politics, such as Puerto Ricans call for a broader identity, hip-hop culture also continues to reinforce stereotypes and unilateral conceptions about race.

Authenticity and Old Racial Politics in Hip-Hop

There is a section in Barack Obama's book *Dreams from My Father* in which the President's old friend Joyce is insisting on her mixed heritage: "I'm not black (...) I'm *multiracial*. Why should I have to choose between them? (...) It's not white people who are making me choose. (...) No—it's *black people* who always have to make everything racial. *They're* the ones making me choose. *They're* the ones who are telling me I can't be who I am" (Obama, 2004: 99). Zadie Smith reacted the same way after being confronted with the color lines of the Unites States:

I suppose it's possible that subconsciously I am also a tragic mulatto, torn between pride and shame. In my conscious life, though, I cannot honestly say I feel proud to be white and ashamed to be black or proud to be black and ashamed to be white. I find it impossible to experience either pride or shame over accidents of genetics in which I had no active part. I understand how those words got into the racial discourse, but I can't sign up to them (Smith URL 2009).

In *Dreams from My Father*, however, Joyce, and the people like her, is a demon that needs to be shattered (Obama, 2004: 99-100). The young Obama's reaction to Joyce is similar to the way many African Americans reacted when Tiger Woods called himself "Cablinasian".³⁷ These are predictable reactions to the racialized world that African Americans live in. It is typical that the oppressed adapts the oppressors' ideological doctrines of racial differences. The usual response to a racist environment has been for the victim to reply in kind against the race of his opponent - not to question the dogma of racism (Gossett, 1972: 86). As Gary Kamiya commented on the reactions to Tiger Woods: "White Pride followers are like 12-step zombies who, despairing of living with the anxiety that accompanies freedom, have handed their identities over to a Higher Caucasian Power. And their black counterparts trap themselves in a similar cul-de-sac" (Kamiya URL 1997). There will be no room for mixed racial identities in such a rigid environment. People like Joyce can then only be viewed as the tragic mulatto: The traitor that is ashamed of her blackness, and who secretly wishes to "pass".

These old ideas of racial transformable bogeymen and identities based on an oppressive environment are, like the ideological concept of a unified black voice, also integrated elements of hip-hop. The beautiful part of hip-hop is that it is a culture filled up with, even partly based on, young people with different ethnic backgrounds and the naïveté of believing

³⁷ Woods claimed on the talk show *Oprah* that being called an African American bothered him, and that he saw himself as a "Cablinasian", as in Caucasian-black-Indian-Asian. Tiger Woods soon received criticism from several high-profiled black Americans. This included light-skinned Colin Powell, who responded to Woods with the following comment: "In America, which I love from the depths of my heart and soul, when you look like me, you're Black" (Kamiya URL 1997).

that their culture can actually help the United States into a more culturally mixed society. But of course, hip-hop, as any other newer culture created in the environment that Kasinitz describes, will still be pushed towards and actively absorb elements of the old racial politics. Here is, as Kitwana writes, the dynamic that can tell us a lot about “where we are, where we’re headed and how hip-hop reinforces stereotypes about race with one hand, even as it equips us to upend old racial paradigms with the other” (Kitwana, 2005: 162). The United States’ racial politics might be shifting, but this transition is naturally not frictionless.

Obama had prior to his first presidential election explained that the cab drivers that once refused to pick him up had no doubt about his blackness. Consequently, neither should anyone else doubt it now: “I self-identify as African American - that's how I'm treated and that's how I'm viewed. I'm proud of it” (CBS News URL 2009) (Obama, 2004: 100). Through the racial environment and a historical memory of oppression, one side of a person’s genetics and cultural heritage ends up with canceling out the other (Smith URL 2009). The rapper Chino XL, who has Puerto Rican and African American ancestry, equally claims his blackness as a reaction to personal experiences of oppression and discrimination. With the song “What Am I” (1996), he launched out on those that wanted to take his blackness away from him “I’m the yellow nigga right? / I’m tired of that. I am not passing, I am black! / I was born black, I live black / And I will die, proud to be called black!”³⁸

Therefore, to avoid the “Joyces” of the world, the black folks who talk down to other blacks, one starts to speak with one voice (Smith URL 2009). That singular voice is the potent “keep it real”-voice. The demands for an authentic expression in hip-hop are therefore connected to the racial dividing line of the greater society (McLeod, 1999: 139). The presence of the color line in hip-hop culture is only natural. Negritude, Afrocentrism, Black Pride and any other manifestations of identity politics are, as Kamiya argues, natural reactions to the bitter legacy of white racism, in which black people have been denied the freedom to define themselves independently of their color (Kamiya 1997 URL). As long as these obstacles continue to exist in American mainstream society, it would be unnatural for pro-black statements, such as the ones found in the lyrics of Common’s “In My Own World” (1994/1998) or Jeru the Damaja’s “The Frustrated Nigga” (1996) to disappear from hip-hop culture. As Lupe Fiasco explains it in this piece of poetry:

³⁸ It should be noted that Chino XL has later also emphasized his Puerto Rican heritage on several occasions. He named for instance his fifth studio album *Ricanstruction: The Black Rosary* (2012).

Uh, and I know it's just a fantasy / I cordially invite you to ask why can't it be /
Now we can do nothing about the past / But we can do something about the future
that we have / We can make it fast or we can make it last / Every woman queen
and every man a king / When those color lines come we can't see between / We
just close our eyes 'till it's all black everything (Lupe Fiasco, 2011: "All Black
Everything").

In the song, Fiasco attacks the concept of authenticity and the ways African Americans continue to act according to the constructed color line. However, Fiasco is also carefully explaining that it is almost impossible, perhaps even unwanted, for African American hip-hopppers to leave pro-black aesthetics behind as long as the culture exists in a racially focused and divided society. For Fiasco it is only in a dreamed world that the contents of the following rhyme is reality: "Uh, and it ain't no projects / Keepin' it real is not an understood concept / Yeah, complexion's not a contest / 'Cause racism has no content." Because of this gap between dream and reality, it occurs that when "those color lines come we can't see between / We just close our eyes 'till it's all black everything."

Concluding Remarks on the Theoretical Construction

Rap music and other forms of hip-hop art therefore still connect realness with blackness, and consequently continue to visualize and guard blackness as a prison cell. Hip-hop is only prolonging stereotypes in that respect. However, hip-hop is still a culture that differs fundamentally from American culture in the larger sense. Firstly, it integrates black culture, history and arts into the everyday life of a significant number of European, Asian and Latin Americans. These daily cultural experiences even come largely on the premises of African Americans. Secondly, hip-hop continues, with its Afrocentrism and Black Pride, to turn the dominant color line of the greater society upside-down, being a multicultural scene in which blacks are being both judges and tastemakers. Being connected to blackness is then naturally an advantage. Consequently, people that are inbetween the color line are making certain actions that they would not have done without hip-hop culture.

Latin Americans for instance, are in the racial politics of both hip-hop culture and American culture a people "inbetween" the two racial sides.³⁹ In mainstream society, they are according to censuses, pushing towards whiteness (Foley, 2004: 342). While they in hip-hop and urban culture are pushing, and being pulled towards blackness. Journalists like Davey D

³⁹ As the rappers in Latin Alliance put it: "Being the fine line between the black and the white man" (Latin Alliance, 1991: "Valla En Pas (Go in Peace)").

and artists like Ice Cube and Toddy Tee operate, as previously noted, through the old racial politics with the typical dividing line between blacks and whites, but they actively include Latin Americans in the black section (Davey D URL 1999) (Davey D URL 2003) (Toddy Tee, 1995: “Black & Brown Pride.”). Intellectuals like Kitwana use “black” rather than “African American” to include all people of African descent (Kitwana, 2005: 151). Latin Americans in hip-hop culture have equally pushed, as we have seen in the preceding chapters and will see more of in the following chapter, for a close-to-blackness approach.

The relationship between Latinos and blacks in hip-hop has attracted the attention of several scholars, intellectuals and writers. Especially the relationship between African Americans and Puerto Ricans in New York has become the basis of some excellent studies. Few have however written about Asian Americans in hip-hop culture and about this group’s relations to authenticity and ideas about race. The following part is therefore an examination of the discourses that can be found in Asian American hip-hop, and how these conversations relate to the ideas of, and demands for, authenticity that we have looked upon in this chapter.

Asian Americans as Inauthentic Participators: Jin as a Case in Point

Contemporary blackness is in hip-hop associated with stereotypes of hyper-masculinity and sexuality, physical aggression, and the underclasses (Wang, 2012: 203). These stereotypes live well in both mainstream society and in hip-hop culture. The difference is that while these associations are stigmatizing in the mainstream, the same associations often work as positive markers of authenticity in hip-hop culture.

McLeod came to the conclusion that black symbolizes real and white symbolizes fake. A further examination will illustrate that brown is associated with blackness, and yellow is associated with whiteness. This is because generalized conceptions of Asian American males are the exact opposite of the dominant stereotypical ideas of African American males (Wang, 2012, 203-204). Asian Americans, who are often viewed and portrayed as feminine, asexual, passive, and middleclass, are further from the real and imaginary ideas of blackness than Latin Americans are. Consequently, being seen as too Asian is a liability in hip-hop culture (Wang, 2012: 209). So, when this thesis stated earlier that Baz Dreisinger was only partly right when she claimed that non-black hip-hoppers “see their music as their race and as a kind of cultural glue which holds them together, defining them as people and as musicians”

(Dreisinger, 2008: 119), it did so because this is an simplification of the dilemmas that non-black rappers are faced with. If Asian Americans in hip-hop saw music as their race, then the textual materials of Asian rappers should show an indifference towards the whole concept of race, but the texts illustrate instead a high degree of sensitivity about race and ethnicity.

Oliver Wang has analyzed a collection of interviews and songs made by Asian American rappers, and his findings indicate that hip-hop culture includes a mixture of factors that pull some Asian Americans towards African Americans and blackness as well as towards the idea of racial indifference. Much of Wang's data exemplify ideas and feelings of self that seems even more conflicted and schizophrenic than the accounts found in the interview with Charlie Chase or Cypress Hill's reactions to the "sell-out" claims (Wang, 2012). It includes for instance the following interview with the Chinese- and Filipino American rapper Southstar.

Q. (Interviewer): How does it feel to be working in an industry where you looked upon as "different" because of your skin color?

A. (Southstar): I don't even notice it most of the time because it's all hip-hop. I just do what I do and not worry about what anyone else has to say.

Q: Growing up rapping, have you ever had any criticism because of your race? If so, how did you deal with this?

A: Being Asian, it definitely meant I had a lot more to prove. I didn't get respect until I earned it. That's how I approached it. The most important thing was that I believed in myself and never gave up.

Q: After listening to your album, you didn't mention once your nationality. Is this a personal reason, or were you advised not to by your management?

A: I just write music. Whether you're white, black, Asian or whatever, I feel hip hop is for all, so it never really crossed my mind to blatantly say I'm Chinese and Filipino in a song. My management definitely supports everything I do, and they allow me to say what I want.

Q: Didn't you once mention that you were the "rap Ichiro"?

A: I did mention that I'm the rap Ichiro, because I do want to make an impact on hip hop as an Asian MC as Ichiro did in baseball as an Asian player. First Asian to win MVP [most valuable player]. I just feel no matter what nationality you are, if you make good music it doesn't matter (Wang, 2012: 210).

Similar to Southstar, the Arab American battle rapper Dizaster has several times invoked on a "hip-hop as a colorblind arena"-rhetoric when he has been insulted because of his ethnicity. In a battle match between The Saurus and Dizaster, the first plays on Dizaster's inauthentic place in hip-hop culture: "I am a legendary great / You were never very great / But looking back through history, that is a hereditary trait / So tell this faggot ass rhymers / Get the fuck out of my battle rap cipher / And go hitchhike a plane or become a taxi-cab driver." Dizaster is then answering back with the following rhyme: "Hip-hop was never about foreigners, immigrants,

citizens / It's about spitting the wickedest / And quite frankly I am sick of this" (*Grind Time Presents: Dizaster vs The Saurus Pt. 1*, 2008). The same pattern is seen in other battles with the rapper. First the opponent plays on the connection between lack of authenticity and Arabic ethnicity, before Dizaster answers by arguing that racism is an inauthentic trait in hip-hop culture (*Dizaster vs Henry Bowers (Basementality Battles)*, 2011).

Dizaster is not necessary doing this because he sees hip-hop as a mythological space where music is the only race and the scene is a cultural glue, but because such an approach to hip-hop culture helps positioning him as an authentic participator. This is clear when one looks at battles Dizaster has done against Asian American rappers, in which he is always attempting to position himself as more racially authentic than his opponents. This behavior is chosen over a continuation of the "colorblind"-approach that he has used in other types of battles. In the match against the American Korean rapper A-Class, Dizaster starts with some surprisingly passive lines: "See I knew that ethnic disses get repetitive and that's straight trash / So I decided not to use them, 'cause I didn't want this to be labeled as another Asian hate rap", but then he flips his verse, and continues with the following rhyme: "And then I realized / A-Class rhymes with train tracks / How fuckin' great is that?" (*Grind Time Now presents: Dizaster vs A-Class*, 2010). The rest of the battle consists of series of jokes and stereotypes about Asians and Asian Americans. The same scenario is seen in the rhymes that Dizaster has directed towards other Asian American rappers (*Grind Time Presents: Dizaster Calls out MC Jin*, 2009) (*Grind Time Now Presents: Dizaster vs Monk McNasty*, 2010).

This is a general trend in battle rap: Participators are either positioning themselves as more racially authentic than the opponent, or they are alternatively flipping the script and using a colorblind rhetoric. In a 2009-battle the rapper Illmaculate is questioning Dizaster's hypocritical combination of racial self-identity. "Yo, this faggot is shameless / You really have to explain this / First you battle The Saurus / Got mad he was racist / Turned around and specifically asked Lush to battle an Asian" (*Grind Time Presents: Dizaster vs. Illmaculate, Part 1, Promo Battle*, 2009.)⁴⁰ Illmaculate is however perfectly aware of the answer.⁴¹ The

⁴⁰ Illmaculate is here referring to Lush One, CEO of the battle league *Grind Time Now*, who arranged the match between Dizaster and A-Class.

⁴¹ Illmaculate's rhymes have a tactical purpose. The rapper's take on the topics authenticity and ethnicity in this battle is in fact very clever. First he puts Dizaster in a catch-22 with the disclosure of his two-faced statements on race in hip-hop, before he later questions Dizaster's ethnicity: "He wanted to be a rapper / Thought he knew the whole recipe / Traded in his worn burqa for something more urban / Now he's feelin' so fresh and clean / He got his pops spendin' cheese on his fitted C / Now he's in the zone mentally / Cop some bigger T's / But you're not a G / Authenticity sold separately" (*Grind Time Presents: Dizaster vs. Illmaculate, Part 2, Promo Battle*, 2009).

colorblind rhetoric is used by rappers that are racially defensive, and the purpose of this approach is to position oneself as equally racially authentic as the opponent. It is a historical origination based on both a factual representation of hip-hop culture and a mythological approach to the culture, in which the latter is especially embraced by non-black participators (Flores, 2008: 32). Approaches to authenticity are therefore often conflicting in hip-hop. Statements and lyrics have commonly this mixture of racial indifference and hypersensitivity. The racial indifference can be seen in how non-black rappers claim that they are participating in a culture that is uninterested in race and ethnicity. The racial hypersensitivity can be seen in how non-black rappers claim that they have faced challenges connected to their racial or ethnical differences, and in how they emphasize a familiarity to blackness.

We have seen this mixture in some of this thesis' quotations from Puerto Rican and Latin American participators in hip-hop culture. Another good example on this subject is Joseph Antonio Cartagena, who is an American musician with Puerto Rican background. He is fairly light skinned, grew up in the borough of Bronx, and came into some local prominence under the alias "Crack" in the graffiti scene of the 1980s. He later claimed fame as a rapper, and has since the beginning of the 1990s been a public figure under the alias Fat Joe. Growing up in the Bronx in the 80s meant for Cartagena a pull towards, and not a push away from, blackness. In 2008 and 2009 Fat Joe was one of the loudest participators in a discussion on whether Latin Americans are entitled to use the word "nigga". For someone like Cartagena this was a no-brainer. On a question from *Complex Magazine* if he ever had been criticized for using the word as a Puerto Rican, he responded with the following: "No absolutely not. Because blacks and Latinos anywhere you go in any hood, any ghetto, were right beside each other, and with each other all the time especially in New York City. They have been calling me 'that nigga' my whole life" (*Spreadit.org* URL 2008).⁴²

Asian American rappers have tried to copy the arguments of this "close to blackness"-approach. This route is however more difficult for Asian Americans, because Latin Americans and African Americans to a larger degree share the same stereotypes, usually live in closer proximity to one another, and have both historically established roles in hip-hop culture. And while Asian Americans are the group that perhaps most often receives racist

This attack is performed with the knowledge that the opponent is now unable to use the colorblind rhetoric in return.

⁴² Baz Dreisinger's studies illustrate how assertions of proximity to blackness have been central for most white rappers. Artists like Paul Wall, Fred Durst and Kid Rock have all connected different aspects of their lives, especially geographical backgrounds, to blackness (Dreisinger, 2008: 114-115). This writer has the same experiences from interviews with white American rappers (Vinnie Paz, personal communication, March 6 2007).

jokes in hip-hop, Latin American are, as we saw earlier, often actively welcomed into hip-hop by African American rappers, intellectuals and writers. Asian Americans do not experience the same pull-factors. They are not included in the larger colored or urban panethnicity that sometimes is applied in hip-hop. But Asian Americans that indulge in hip-hop equally connect themselves with blackness. Studies on segmented assimilation illustrate that for example many young Vietnamese Americans have been assimilated into urban culture and that Hmong students identify more with their African American counterparts than with white middleclass students (Zhou and Bankston, 1998) (Lee, 2009: 130-131).

The best way for Asian Americans to meet the demands for authenticity and to fit into the culture, is to balance between “being true to oneself” and not being “too Asian”. Charlie Chase said that he constantly had to deal with conflicting demands. He had to be a “homeboy”, but he also had to be a homeboy without trying to be black (Flores, 2012: 79). Asian Americans are facing the exact same challenges. These rappers are therefore sometimes constructing relations between themselves and blackness on the basis of experiences that originally seems quite farfetched. This is for instance seen in the lyrics to the song “After School” by Asian American group Fists of Fury. In the song, Darow Han, under the rap alias C.Y.A.T. (Cute Young Asian Terrorist), challenges both Asian and African Americans to ignore the myths that have driven a wedge between them. In the following rhyme he is arguing that Asian and African Americans are connected to common experiences as victims of an educational system that encourage racial hierarchies that privilege whites (Wang, 2012: 205).

First grade to college / You’re pushed to work hard / Get all A’s on every report card / Your teachers will say, / “Isn’t he a bright child, / Not like the Blacks, / Who always act wild” / Everyone expects you to be a genius / Valedictorian when you’re a senior / But, hey, brother, sister, haven’t you heard? / Behind your back, they’re callin’ you a nerd! / American schools create whitewashed fools / ‘Cause the man from the caves wants mental slaves / American schools create whitewashed fools / ‘ Cause the man from the caves wants mental slaves (Wang, 2012: 205).

Darow Han fits into the group of young Asian Americans that Lee writes about. They feel marginalized, and they see hip-hop as an opponent of racial and class inequality. If hip-hop is a culture that can give young minorities a voice, self-empowerment and political influence, then it is only natural that they try to fit into that culture. And building a connection by common experiences of being stereotyped is not as farfetched as it might first seem. Stacey

Lee has for instance documented that Southeast Asian boys who have enacted in more of an African American style have been cast as deviants by their teachers (Lee, 2009: 131).

Jin (born Jin-Au Yeung), a Chinese American rapper with some commercial success, is another good example of Asian American attempts to build Afro-Asian alliances. In 2004 Jin was the first Asian American rapper to release a hip-hop album through a major record label (*The Rest is History*, 2004). On the album, Jin does several attempts to establish connections between African and Asian Americans. In “Love Song” (2004), the rapper is using a personal history of an interracial relationship between himself and a black girlfriend to illustrate how the younger and racially more open generation is struggling against an older and more biased generation. In the song, the struggle is racially, but not generationally, universal. Jin’s effort to connect is seen even better in the song “Same Cry” (2004). Here he tries to build a cross-cultural recognition between the two groups through a shared historical memory of oppression:

Stuck between the rock and a hard place / Thinking about the refugees that went
to see God’s face / Sixteen thousand miles across the ocean tides / Some died,
some got lucky and survived / I wouldn’t call it luck – they reached the
destination / Modern day slavery without the plantation / Them sneakers on your
feet cost a hundred a pop / He’s making fifty cent a day working in sweat shops
(...) We may look different / But we see the same sky / We may see different /
But we cry the same cry (Jin, 2004: “Same Cry”).

Jin knew that as an Asian American MC he would instantly be grouped as an inauthentic participator, because he would be too close to whiteness and because Asian Americans are still looked upon as strangers in African American communities. The view of Asians as strangers from a different shore exists in all parts of American society, also in hip-hop culture. Ideas of Asian Americans as an unnatural part of society can be seen in hip-hop culture in movies such as *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), in conflicts that involve Asian American rappers (Grind Time Presents: Dizaster Snaps on Jin, 2009) (Dizaster, 2009: “Love Me Long Time”), and in songs like “Us” (1991) by Ice Cube. These songs and movies continue to portray Asian Americans as a new and un-American group (Chang, 2005: 346-347). It can be argued that this is part of a continuation of the historical rejection of Asians as American citizens. This newer rejection refuses to see the long history of Asians in the United States and in African American communities, and it has found particularly extensive support among other abused minorities. Ronald Takaki, for example, claims that the tension between African and Asian Americans is rooted in a mutual influence

of stereotypes (Takaki, 1998: 494) (Aahlin, 2010: 9-10). That Jin's music is racially sensitive is therefore unsurprising.

The comparison used in "Same Cry" is, as Oliver Wang has noted, a stretch (Wang, 2012: 215). But the lyrics of the song illustrate how Jin positions himself by rapping on how close the experiences of himself and of "his people" are to the experiences of the African American listeners. However, at other times Jin reaches out to the mythical human hip-hop race rhetoric, for instance seen in this statement from an interview. "I think all it comes down to is the quality of the music. (...) I'm not going to say that the race thing isn't a big issue, but when the music comes out, if it's good music, it will be good, if it's bad, it will be bad" (Wang, 2012: 215). Another good example is Jin's song "Tsunami Response" (2005). The song is a bitter and well-deserved attack on the hip-hop radio channel *Hot 97*. The white media conglomerate Emmis Communications owns *Hot 97*, but the channel is often, because of its contents, perceived as black media. In Jin's response to the channel's airing of the racist song/joke "Tsunami Song" (2005), he is carefully not making a division between himself and blackness, or creating an alienation based on him as an Asian American. Because being too Asian could be seen as not being black enough, and Jin did not want people to stop listening to him because they did not relate to his ethnicity. He therefore went far in explaining that he was not an ethnical based rapper, but that he spoke out of human experiences and a non-racial fashion:

Jin is far from a human right activist / So don't take this in a political fashion /
Nope, its just a good old lyrical bashing / In fact I'm making it a mission of mine /
Won't stop 'till every last petition is signed / Hip-hop is designed to unify the
masses / And we demand that you be denied the access (Jin, 2005: "Tsunami
Response").

Before he later continues with "But you know I got love for everyone. Whether you black, white, Hispanic. That's why I love hip hop 'cause it bring us all together." There is a keen awareness of race, even when he is addressing issues that are specific to Asian Americans Jin makes sure that he follows the Asian American tradition in hip-hop of shying away from explicit statements on race and ethnicity (Wang, 2012: 208).⁴³ Otherwise, he could have been seen as inauthentic or irrelevant. Some of the "hip-hop as a colorblind arena"-rhetoric is just that: rhetoric. And even though Latin Americans more directly speak explicitly about ethnic

⁴³ I am of course aware that the 2004-tsunami was a tragedy that hit in fact most ethnic groups of people. But the tsunami was in this specific case, in the horrific racist song and in the response by Jin, treated as a tragedy in Asia that hit local people.

and racial experiences, all non-black participators in hip-hop culture converse with great racial sensitivity.

Concluding Remarks on the Case in Point

Members of different minority groups have for several decades assimilated into hip-hop culture. This chapter has looked into how Puerto Ricans in New York, Hmong Americans in Wisconsin, Chinese Americans in Miami, and Mexican Americans in Los Angeles and other minority groups in the United States have followed and participated in an African American urban culture. These, mostly second-generation, Americans have decided to enter a culture that has a set of ideas about race and ethnicity that differ from the mainstream ideas about these issues. They are actively participating in a culture that historically has often been openly hostile towards non-black participators, and they chose to enter a culture in which the members are often marked with stigmatizing characterizations by mainstream society. So, why are they then deciding to assimilate into hip-hop culture?

We have seen in this chapter how hip-hop culture connects authenticity with blackness. It is consequently fair to conclude that blackness has certain attractive elements for many young people. This chapter has highlighted many examples of minority youths that copy and learn African American traits, or what is believed to be African American traits, and invoke on arguments that stress geographical, cultural and mythological closeness to this ethnic group. This mostly happens in order to fit into the culture, but it is occasionally also done to signalize distance from what is felt to be a hostile mainstream society.

Several segmented assimilation theorists have studied the assimilation into urban African American cultures, and they are mostly quite negative towards it. They underestimate however the mobility and richness of African American culture. They are utterly pessimistic towards the positive contributions of American urban culture, and its political potentials. Moreover, these scholars are unable to see the potential of new racial politics in the United States. Assimilation into hip-hop culture can most certainly have negative consequences for the assimilated. But there can also be highly positive aspects in assimilation into hip-hop culture, both on personal and collective levels. Political power, youth mobilization, self-empowerment and mass media representation are just some of the possible positive factors that remain overlooked in segmented assimilation studies. The potential of these factors are accordingly the focus in the next chapter.

4 The Positive Aspects of Assimilation into Hip-Hop Culture

In 2011 veteran hip-hop reporter Touré published the book *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness? What It Means to Be Black Now*. In the book Touré argues that the younger generation of African Americans is about to move away from the idea of a unified blackness, and into a new country where blackness could be anything. Although the author does not believe in colorblindness, he believes that the old color line is slowly losing its power. He is far from the only leading African American voice that has predicted a gradual weakening of the long hated color line. Rappers like Chuck D and Ice-T argued decades ago that multiculturalism and hip-hop culture brought with it cultural desegregation (Chang, 2005: 425). Historian Robin D.G. Kelley coined back in 1999 the term polyculturalism in an attempt to restore the radical vision of integration, while Carl Hancock Rux in 2003 speculated that the culture of race could begin to mean more than the sociopolitical, economic, and physiological history of race in America (Kelley URL 1999) (Rux, 2003). Professor of African-American Studies and Economics, Gerald D. Jaynes had a similar point of view when he theorized that:

Increased ethnic diversity within the underclass portends a profound transformation in American perceptions of race and in its intergroup relations. My own view is that although the cultural tradition confounding poverty and dependency with being African American will die hard, it will die. (Jaynes, 2004: 114).

For Jaynes the recent social construction of the “underclass” exhibits greater “flexibility and less rigid racial stratification than did similar social practices of the past” (Jaynes, 2004: 101). In addition, the increasing existence of middle-class and elite African Americans render blackness as too imprecise to be sustained as synonyms for underclass (Jaynes, 2004: 114-115). Bakari Kitwana too predicts a less racialized future for the United States. He writes that the younger generation has brought with it new racial politics that are cutting edge (Kitwana, 2005: 162). If there really is an ongoing development in the United States from a popularized idea of blackness to post-blackness, then the big question is if this transition is a good thing. As Lupe Fiasco asks in “All Black Everything”, if racism has content, is it then not only logical that “keeping it real” is an understood concept (Lupe Fiasco, 2011)?

In his contribution to the discussion of post-blackness, African American novelist Darryl Pinckney argues strongly that blackness should continue to be a valid conception. Pinckney invokes generations of racist hostility and the recent murder of Trayvon Martin to dismiss the new ideas of race as utopianism (Pinckney, 2012: 35-37). He writes on the murder of Martin that an “armed Latino’s suspicion that a tall, thin black youth in a hoodie in a gated community at night must be an intruder up to no good closes for me discussion about a post-racial society” (Pinckney, 2012: 35). The undersigned stated in the introductory chapter that writers on urban culture too often overestimate the power and influence of hip-hop culture. They sometimes treat hip-hop as a social force mightier than it really is. To be fair, most of these writers have never said that the United States is turning into a post-racial society. But there are reasons to argue, as Pinckney does, that some voices inside the culture are overestimating what hip-hop arts and hip-hop activism can do to alter the continued injustices connected to race in the United States. As Mos Def once rapped it: “Hip-hop will simply amaze you / Praise you, pay you / Do whatever you say do / But black, it cannot save you” (Mos Def, 1999: “Hip Hop”). Ideals of justice, racial equality, and radical social transformation do most likely need something more than hip-hop culture.

Nonetheless, the example of the tragic death of Trayvon Martin contains another very interesting aspect, and this is a characteristic of the culture that typifies its potential forces. While a black teenager might still be murdered because of stereotypical conceptions, hip-hop culture has helped create a climate where such a murder will generate larger and louder protests than before. This is the potential of hip-hop culture that keeps being overlooked by segmented assimilation theorists. If you like rap music, then you are automatically listening to the experiences and opinions of young voices from different cities, whether it is how these people is feeling about employment prospects, or about the local effects of the war on drugs. As Jeff Chang stated; all stories that are overlooked by the media are bubbling up through rap music, and a good example is the protests against the profiling and murder of Martin:

I don’t think anybody would have been surprised either by the amount of urgency with which young people began tweeting and Facebooking the details of the Trayvon Martin case, because it’s remained — the question of being profiled for what you wear, being profiled for your dress code, as one rapper put it all the way back in 1991. This has been part of the script of what some people call the hidden transcript, or the counter transcript that hip hop offers (Riley URL 2012).

Hip-hop’s political power is based on its roots and experiences as a resistance culture. This is the counter transcript that Chang uses to explain different political and social movements,

from the widespread protests against Proposition 21 in California to the reactions on the murder of Martin (Chang, 2005: 455-457) (Riley URL 2012). Hip-hop is, as Tricia Rose writes, the development of a style that nobody can deal with – a style that cannot be easily understood or erased, a style that has the reflexivity to create counterdominant narratives against a mobile and shifting enemy (Rose, 2008: 27). The idea that hip-hop is a powerful and effective culture of protests has been expressed by everyone from Dream Hampton to Jesse Jackson to Touré (*Versus Hip-Hop on Trial Debate*, 2012). As Rose writes: “In the postindustrial urban context of dwindling low-income housing, a trickle of meaningless jobs for young people, mounting police brutality, and increasingly draconian depictions of young inner city residents, hip hop style is black urban renewal” (Rose, 2008: 27).

This ability to speak of, protest, and broadcast very specific generational problems is one of the main reasons behind hip-hop culture’s attractiveness. It is also one of the main reasons behind the argument that assimilation into hip-hop culture is a positive thing. In the same fashion as Tricia Rose wrote that hip-hop is black urban renewal, Chuck D once very famously said that hip-hop is CNN for black people. But in a globalized postindustrial world, it becomes increasingly more accurate to say that it is the CNN for marginalized young people, period (Riley URL 2012). Mohamed El Deeb, one of the leading artists in North Africa and an instrumental voice of the Egyptian revolution, reported that every uprising in the Arabic spring had hip-hop activism as an integrated part of the protests (*Versus Hip-Hop on Trial Debate*, 2012) (*Free Speech Radio News Documentaries* URL 2011). Internationally, hip-hop has been used as a tool for protests and mobilization by everyone from local organizers at the Gaza Strip to British-Tamilian and international superstar M.I.A.⁴⁴ Domestically, hip-hop has been used as a tool for protest and mobilization by an increased diversity of minority groups.

By the mid-1990s global economics had changed the way culture is broadcasted, and multiculturalism had brought diversity into popular culture (Kitwana, 2005: 128) (Chang, 2005: 249-250). Being African American is however, despite all these changes, still often connected with poverty and limited options in terms of work and studies. Nonetheless, in a country with narrowing options for working-class youths in general, and with the construction of a “new underclass”, this is an repression that has been extended over more and more youths, both white and colored (Kitwana, 2005: 140) (Jaynes, 2004: 104). Gerald Jaynes

⁴⁴ On hip-hop’s role on the Gaza Strip, see the documentary *Slingshot Hip Hop* (2008). On the political agenda of M.I.A., see the artist’s album *Arular* (2005).

predication, that with the continuous growth of non-black poverty the earlier racial separation line will be deemed obsolete, is historically accompanied by Paul E. Peterson, Suzanne Model, and a good number of other scholars (Jaynes, 2004: 105-108) (Peterson, 1991) (Model, 1993: 161-163). If these assumptions are true, then discrimination is for a minority member a presumption that is rebuttable. “The experiences and opportunities confronted by contemporary migrants of color,” are therefore as Jaynes writes “now more comparable to those of white ethnic immigrants of the past” (Jaynes, 2004: 102). In a country then where the underclass is more racially and ethnically diverse than ever, and in a nation where a growing number of problems are generationally more than racially specific, hip-hop has in some ways been a substitute for the old capstone business, the union, and other local pillars of the working class communities, because hip-hop culture has involved and continues to invoke people into cultural resistance. If this is not automatically a good thing, then it is certainly not a movement that can be written off as an unfortunate development without any sufficient arguments. In view of that, this chapter explores the political tools that are available through assimilation into hip-hop culture, the effectiveness of these tools and how they are used.

There is a song called “Civil War” (2011), where African American rapper Killer Mike and his colleagues, Latin American rapper Immortal Technique, and Muslim rapper Brother Ali, are criticizing the United States for being a racial and religious oppressive society. The song follows in a long tradition where rappers with different ethnicities come together in order to speak out on exclusion and alienation from mainstream society. But the rhymes of Killer Mike (born Michael Render) also include a new interesting trend in hip-hop culture. As Killer Mike has called out Crips, Bloods, Latin American gang members and the Chicago gangs People and Folk Nation for a peaceful unification, he continues with the line: “If you on the bottom, be you Anglo or Asian / You gotta recognize the realness of what I’m saying.” Hip-hop culture has always built alliances that have been founded on common history of oppression and broad definitions of otherness. While many of these early coalitions were based on similarities in the urban lives of African Americans and Latin Americans, there are some indications that the more recent alliances in hip-hop have been less occupied with ideas of race, and more about ideas of class. The class-structured basis in Killer Mike’s verse is not a unique example. For as the racialized conceptions in mainstream society become less rigid, so do the racial counter conceptions of hip-hop culture.

Historically hip-hop culture has established associations between people based on racial otherness to America’s white mainstream, and on the basis of socioeconomically

otherness to the mythological idea of a class-free America. For example, Latin Americans are in the racial politics of both hip-hop and American culture a people “inbetween” the two racial sides, and it is evident that a number of Latin Americans choose to assimilate into hip-hop culture because of feelings of racial otherness. This is seen in the works of Juan Flores (2012), Mandalit del Barco (1996) and others. However, it is also clear that many Latin Americans assimilate into hip-hop culture because of socioeconomically marginalization. This is seen in the works of Jeff Chang, Gerald Jaynes and others (Jaynes, 2004: 101, 105 & 110) (Riley URL 2012). Both these bases are found in youth organizations such as Project Hip Hop, Inc. in Massachusetts, Organize Resistance in Kansas, and Youth Force in New York. These are just a few examples of the political organizations that engage in hip-hop culture in order to create counterdominant narratives to the mythological ideas of an equal, class free, and racially just America (The Active Element Foundation, 2002: 91, 100 and 117).

Multiculturalism and Hip-Hop Activism: Cultural Journalism, Indie Film, Pop Music and Rap Radio as the New Guerilla Battlefields

Under a panel discussion held at the Ford Foundation in 2005, several high-profiled hip-hop intellectuals connected the cultural desegregation of hip-hop with the ideology of multiculturalism. In the discussion Vijay Prashad claimed that multiculturalism was a conservative ideology from above, which “decided not to engage with the principal feature of the antiracism movements, the antiracist movements which fought white supremacy and power” (Tate, et al., 2006: 33-37). Prashad, Naomi Klein, Sharon Zukin and Billy Wimsatt are just a sample of professors, authors and activists that have argued convincingly about the conservative and reactionary nature of the mixture between African American street culture and corporate America (Klein, 2001: 76) (Zukin, 1995: 41-43) (Echols, 2002: 189-192). In general, few positive words have been used to describe multiculturalism after the ideology suffered a backlash with the works of Nathan Glazer (1997) and Stanley Fish (1997). There are many good reasons behind the skepticism towards multiculturalism, some of them are presented earlier in this thesis, but the actual effects of the ideology are far more complex than the overly negative picture that is usually painted.

The fact remains that the ideology helped launch the career of thousands of artists, including very provocative ones, like Chuck D, Ice-T, and Spike Lee, pushed African

Americans from the margins and into the mainstream culture, and gave birth to hip-hop activism. With different forms of colored and urban culture, first and foremost hip-hop culture, African Americans and ideas of blackness moved to the center of the new global media (Tate, et al., 2006: 33-34) (Chang, 2005: 249). Hip-hop culture is a vital part in the history of multiculturalism, just as it is a central part of today's post-multicultural society. Now, the academic world has discussed ideas such as polyculturalism, blackness, post-blackness, globalism, and transnationalism in order to find explanations for the aesthetics and the culture of the new racial politics, but they have oddly enough mostly failed to consider hip-hop seriously. This happens despite the fact that the culture has "easily been the most popular global articulation of new aesthetics" (Tate, et al., 2006: 34). Hip-hop is in other words an overlooked factor in the post-multicultural society.

What can hip-hop culture tell us about the Americanization of young ethnic minorities? A way to avoid discrimination for Italian Americans was to distance themselves from African Americans. In much research, this seems to be equally true for non-African American colored minorities (Trotter, 2004: 91-92). Other studies however done on ethnical groups as diverse as the Hmong people and Puerto Ricans explain how significant numbers of young colored minorities continue to idolize and/or identify with African Americans (Lee, 2009: 130-131) (Wang, 2012: 202). While it might still make sense to avoid African Americans because blackness often carries with it the presumption of underclass stigma, the changes in stigmatization from prejudice-based attitudes to calculated prejudgments make the color line less rigid. In other words; if blackness has changed from being a stable stigma to a marker that frequently carries a stigma, then it is less reasons for non-African Americans to avoid African Americans (Jaynes, 2004: 101 & 106).

Furthermore, many of the markers of stigmatization that have followed the social construction of underclass go beyond race, but are more connected with the cultures of inner-city neighborhoods, youths and hip-hop. Such stigmatizations can create the type of inter-ethnic solidarity that one can find in so much of hip-hop.⁴⁵ This is seen in the new racial politics, where young people are seeking to access hip-hop as an agent of social change. It is here that black, Asian, white and Latino youths have the most experience in forming multicultural alliances and coalitions (Kitwana, 2005: 162) (Chang, 2005: 453-465). Since the

⁴⁵ This is for instance seen in white graffiti artist Billy "Upski" Wimsatt's call for regional warfare in 1994: "I say bomb the suburbs because the suburbs have been bombing us for at least the last forty years. They have waged an economic, political, and cultural war on life in the city" (Wimsatt, 2008: 11).

late 1980s hip-hop activists have organized across race and ethnicity to battle problems that are very specific to their generation: Crack cocaine wars, paramilitary policing units, the anti-youth public policies of the 1980s and 1990s, the prison-industry-complex, bleak employment prospects, inadequate schooling, educational budget cuts, rising income differences, nearly non-existent economic infrastructure in certain communities, gentrification and unaffordable housing, overwhelming whiteness in institutions of power, and negative portrayals of African Americans and other minorities in the media.⁴⁶ These activists have concentrated on music and other forms of art, radio, cultural journalism, and grassroots activism, with the goal of having as much media power as possible (Tate, et al., 2006: 49).

The ideology is reflected in the music. “It has to start somewhere / It has to start sometime / What better place than here? / What better time than now? / All hell can’t stop us now!” Latin American vocalist Zack de la Rocha shouted out as Rage Against the Machine urged people to turn on their guerilla radio (Rage Against the Machine, 1999: “Guerilla Radio”). Meanwhile, groups like dead prez pushed for a boycott of the traditional media channels (dead prez, 2002: “Turn off the Radio”). The intention of these artists and activists were, as Chang writes, “not only to take their message into the media, but take over the media with their message” (Chang, 2005: 250).

Hip-hop activists have been everything from artists, Chuck D and Boots Riley, to journalists Harry Allen and Greg Tate, moguls Russell Simmons and Sean Combs, and activists, Lisa Sullivan and Alex Sanchez. Hip-hop activism has usually started locally, like Sanchez’s Homies Unidos in Los Angeles, or the Third Eye Movement in the San Francisco Bay Area, but it most often quickly expanded into nationwide and global criticism. Hip-hop activists became central in the 1999 protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, and in several national demonstrations against the police and the prison system. They also became important in making new organizations such as League of Pissed off Voters and the Hip Hop Summit Action Network, and they would later be significant for the establishment of the hip-hop voting bloc, as seen in the election of Obama, and in the non-partisan protest movements, as seen in Occupy Wall Street.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ On the political issues confronted by hip-hop activists see Chang (2005: 249-250), Kitwana (2005, 24, 154 & 172), Riley (URL 2012) and Wimsatt (2008: 11-13).

⁴⁷ On the history of hip-hop activism see Arnold (2006: 71-84), Brinkley (2002), Chang (2005: 453-465), Kitwana (2005: 163-210), Riley (URL 2012), Stanage (URL 2012) and The Active Element Foundation (2002: 50 & 100).

Interchangeable with the hip-hop activist are all the people of color that are not necessary activists or practitioners, but who are still deeply immersed in African American culture as followers (Kitwana, 2005: 70). Despite lack of artistic involvement or political activism, these people react positive to the political aspects of hip-hop culture and black activism. As Jeff Chang summarizes it:

Although not all hip hop is exclusively political, a good amount of it speaks to the kinds of pressures that young people have been facing because of globalization, changes in policing and the incarceration of youth and oftentimes, the breakdown of institutions and structures in the communities that hip hop comes from (Riley 2012 URL).

From Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" (1982) to Killer Mike's "Reagan" (2012), hip-hop continues to create narratives of American life that are fundamentally different from anything else in popular culture, and it continues to be an idealized tool for describing and protesting the war on youths and other selected political issues. Furthermore, these narratives are connecting with other ethnic minorities, both because of its non-white heroes (and anti-heroes) and because of the problems and situations that these accounts are describing. Just as kung fu films once were extraordinary popular in African American communities because they offered the only non-white heroes, besides the Blaxploitation genre, in mainstream culture, hip-hop culture is today the main source for non-white heroes in popular cultural storylines.⁴⁸ This builds a relationship between African American artistry, activism and history with other responding ethnic groups. Such a relationship can be established both before and after immigration to the United States.⁴⁹

Concluding Remarks on the Theoretical Construction

Segmented assimilation theorists often draw similarities between assimilation into African American urban cultures and downward assimilation. This chapter questions if such a comparison should be accepted, because assimilation into hip-hop culture contains a diverse range of role models, relevant arts, means of self-empowerment, political power and cultural flexibility. According to the song "Hip Hop" (1999) by dead prez, hip-hop is simply bigger

⁴⁸ For more on interethnic solidarity in popular culture and in Hong Kong kung fu films, see for instance Gina Marchetti's "Jackie Chan and the Black Connection" (2001).

⁴⁹ On relationships between African Americans and other ethnic or national groups that have been built or strengthened because of hip-hop culture see Chang (2005: 448-450), Flores (1996), Kahf (2012), Lee (2009: 130-131), Mitchell, 2001), Pablo (2002) and Perry (2012).

than just being a protesting art form, it is a weapon that can remedy the injustices and inadequacies in a Eurocentric society (Strode and Wood, 2008: viii). The group has a point.

Let us dwell a little by the example of Puerto Rican graffiti painter Mare 139 (born Carlos Rodriguez) and his assimilation into hip-hop culture. His experiences in hip-hop have elements of Juan Flores' explanations on the development of Latin rap, Richard Albas' ideas of hybrid cultures, the point of intersection between the new and the old racial politics, and the rising polycultural traits of inner-city societies.⁵⁰ His cultural transition also illustrates how African Americans followed the Irish American example in being role models and in being an already established minority group that was both inclusive and exclusive in their actions towards the newer minority group (Roediger and Barrett, 2004: 174-179). Mare 139 had this to say about being a non-African American in hip-hop:

It promotes some kind of racist attitude, saying "This is a black thing' don't even come close." What happens is a lot of young blacks don't understand how the Puerto Rican experience relates to the black experience. When Latino rappers come out, they get sort of dissed, in the sense of saying, "Why you trying to do a black thing? Why you trying to act black?" I used to have the mock necks and the shell toes, and the Pro-Keds, and my mom used to be, like, "What up? Why you want to be a Moreno?" But it's that integrating that happens in the ghetto. It wasn't a black thing, it was a b-boy thing, 'cause when you threw on your gear, you threw on *your* gear. My mom used to call me a light-skinned black, blah-blah-blah. That was just another generation. They didn't understand. But to the brothers of Africa and Puerto Rica and all that, we all hung together (del Barco, 1996: 68).

The integration portrayed by Mare 139 has been a bumpy ride with interethnic conflicts, and several negative aspects. But it has been an integration that, despite hip-hop culture's varied hostility to racial outsiders, has contributed to a space where people integrate on different terms than in the rest of society. In addition, it has been an integration that includes numerous positive features for the assimilated. Several of these potential positive aspects have been listed previously in this thesis, and the focus in the second part of this chapter will be on the opportunities to protest abusive and violent actions conducted by police officers and security agencies as a case in point for this underlying argument.

⁵⁰ Flores writes that "Latin rap first took shape as an expression of the cultural turf shared, and contended for, by African Americans and Puerto Ricans over their decades as neighbors, coworkers, and 'homies' in the inner-city communities" (Flores, 2012: 75). Alba writes that new immigration cultures are increasingly taking the form of hybrids of cultural materials brought by the immigrants and cultural materials gained in their new country (Alba, 1999: 9). For more on the intersection between the new and the old racial politics and the rising polycultural traits of inner-city neighborhoods, see Kitwana (2005: 162) and del Barco (1996: 68). See also pages 51-53.

Hip-Hop Culture's Counterdominant Narratives: Protests against Police Brutality as a Case in Point

Hip-hop activists and artists have since the 1980s organized across race and ethnicity in order to speak out against a diverse set of problems that are very specific to their generation. Hip-hop culture has, at its best, countered dubious statements from national and local authorities, and challenged the hegemony of liberal bourgeois spokespersons in the minority communities. One can point to a series of songs from the beginning of the 1980s that speak truth to power and provide a beat reporter's view of life in the inner-city. Mark Anthony Neal highlights Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" (1982), N.W.A.'s "Straight Outta Compton" (1988) and Boogie Down Productions' "Love's Gonna Get'cha" (1990) as examples of inner-city reports that provided contexts "for the gang violence, drug dealing, and petty criminality that were deeply imbricated in the mainstream's perceptions of Black urban life" (Neal, 2006: 634).

Secondly, one can point to numerous organizations and activist groups that originated in hip-hop culture that use hip-hop in order to protest against and speak about certain aspects of life in inner-city communities. *Future 500*, a groundbreaking study of 500 new youth organizations in the United States, highlights *Midnight Forum*, *Guerrilla Wordfare* and *Demon Killer Committee* as examples of hip-hop activist groups that tell the otherwise untold story of the new generation's response to vast economic inequality and corporate abuse, the attacks on public services, unprecedented rates of incarceration and the persistence of military, political, and community violence (The Active Element Foundation, 2002: v, 67, 96 & 136).

One of hip-hop culture's most central concerns has been wanton use of excessive force by the police. While African and Latin Americans disproportionately experience police brutality, they do not always obtain the media attention received by their white counterparts (Human Rights Watch, 1998: 61). According to several NGOs and activists, news outlets routinely ignore non-lethal police brutality (Nittle URL 2011a and 2011b) (RT URL 2013). Urban renewal programs, crack cocaine wars, paramilitary policing units and widespread anti-youth public policies in the 1980s and 1990s are some of the factors that have lead to excessive use of police force in areas mostly populated by people of color. Hip-hop, in its diverse forms, has always protested these politics and their consequences. As J. Pablo in *The Village Voice* writes: "Though artists like Curtis Mayfield, Marvin Gaye and Baby Huey

spoke on police corruption, it wasn't until the dawn of the rap era that the message in the music began to convey the anger and frustration of people who had been systematically disenfranchised and brutalized" (Pablo URL 2012).

Rappers started early to address police violence, emergency services refusal to enter minority neighborhoods and police officers' involvement in drug trafficking. The cultural resistance against authoritarian oppression and encroachments eventually grew into more organized forms of political activism, and both the artistic and the organizational oppositions towards governmental abuse have since been used widely as blueprints for grassroots activism by other ethnic minorities.

Rap Music as Resistance

Hip-hop was never solely defined by being the culture of a generation of young colored urbanites affected by urban deterioration, decay and drugs, but a significant number of the artists and audience were working poor urbanites. Hip-hop was the art form of the most neglected and despised members of the United States, and it offered these people a platform to "critique the conditions that defined their existence" (Neal, 2008: 81). Public Enemy for instance developed further a long tradition of using music as a tool of protest, and consequently they became new role models for a generation of colored youths that felt let down by the Civil Rights generation and neglected by the new colored middleclass.⁵¹ In "911 Is a Joke" (1990) the group addressed the state of emergency services in poor black and Latino communities, in "Don't Believe the Hype" (1988) the group took on the liberal bourgeois spokespersons in the minority communities, while "Anti-Nigger Machine" (1990) attacked the great amount of police brutality in the United States (Neal, 2006: 634-635).

Public Enemy was accompanied by dozens of new voices that used their artistry to inform about the police's conduct in their neighborhoods. Toddy Tee came with the song "Batterram" (1985), where he in great detail raps about the effects of Daryl Gates' Operation Hammer in Los Angeles. More popularized tales of violence conducted by police officers in Los Angeles and New York followed with the groups N.W.A. and Boogie Down Productions (N.W.A., 1988: "F--- tha Police) (Boogie Down Productions, 1989: "Who Protects Us From

⁵¹ For more on African American music as resistance, see for instance Mary Ellison's *Lyrical Protest: Black Music's Struggle Against Discrimination* (1989) and "African American Music as Resistance" (2006) by Lawrence W. Levine, Bernice Johnson Reagon and Mark Anthony Neal.

You?”). As different states increased their use of punitive measures to contain and incarcerate large number of young people of color, more and more rappers started to express a rage that was generational as well as racial (Riley URL 2012). All these feelings that were expressed in the music of KRS-One, N.W.A. and Public Enemy echoed the thoughts and experiences of many non-African American youths of color in cities in the United States. These artists worked then as role models for at least two generations of Latin American artists, from Cypress Hill, Kid Frost and A Lighter Shade of Brown to Rebel Diaz, Immortal Technique and Jackpot.

Hip-hop culture and rap music had some obvious advantages in the world of grassroots activism. Firstly, hip-hop artistry requires little or none economical funding. The culture’s “do it yourself”-nature is one of its most attractive features. Secondly, rap music provided a platform for young people to express themselves in a ruthless and straightforward manner. That platform is, for better or worse, still unmatched in global media. Rap music did not need any permission to say what it said, and consequently a vivid selection of non-white anti-heroes entered the American mainstream. “My identity by itself causes violence,” rapped Eazy-E (born Eric Wright) on “F--- tha Police” (1988). By doing so, he invoked both racial features and new underclass stigmatizations in order to explain his violent self, the dystopic community, and the oppressive state agencies. Eazy-E and all the other African Americans that operated as local reporters became highly influential role models for young members of other minority groups.

When Cypress Hill exploded onto the scene in 1991, listeners of their debut-album were first greeted by “Pigs” (1991), which is a song that uses the formula of a nursery rhyme in order to lyrically jump down the police’s throat. The lead vocalist of the group, B-Real (born Louis Freese), explained the song’s background with the following words:

I’ve always been fucked with by the cops, more when I was younger, whether I was doing something wrong or not. So I figured I couldn’t do anything, I couldn’t take them to court or nothing, so the only way I could lash out at those fuckers was with a song. It was a form of therapy for me (Coleman, 2007: 127).

B-Real used the formula of earlier recorded protest songs in rap music to describe and direct his own anger towards the police. Haitian-immigrant Wyclef Jean argued in the same manner when he described his group The Fugees’ protest song “The Beast” (1996). According to Jean, the police were harassing him because he was black, and not because of his ethnicity (Coleman, 2007: 217). If their non-white identities were the reasons for their problems, then it

made sense to affiliate with African Americans, especially when it were first and foremost African Americans that publicly addressed these problems. From the beginning of the 1990s and all the way up until today, many colored youths have relied on general African American traditions of protest arts and hip-hop cultural formulas of self-empowerment and counter-narratives. Pointed out in this chapter are only some of the most successful examples of cultural adaptations.

Kid Frost (born Arturo Molina, Jr.), one of the greatest Mexican American rappers of all time, is another good example of a minority person that assimilated into hip-hop culture. He frowns on Latinos that have assimilated into mainstream America, calling them “coconuts” that are brown on the outside and white on the inside (del Barco, 1996: 77). In 1990, Kid Frost got together with other political minded Latin American rappers to make protest music. The group Latin Alliance’s self-titled album (1991) questions the United States alleged hypocrisy, the country’s immigration laws, and the racial stereotypes found in society. Fellow group member Mellow Man Ace (born Ulpiano Sergio Reyes) had this to say about the inspiration for the multinational collaboration in the group: “I think if us as hispanics were more like the blacks, who get up and shout and scream and get what’s ours, we’d be more successful” (del Barco, 1996: 77).

The inspirational sources were just as clear when Kid Frost joined forces with African American rapper MC Eiht and Mexican American rapper A.L.T. to record the song “I Got Pulled Over” (1992). While protesting racial profiling, the three performers make it clear that blacks and Latinos are the same in the eyes of the police. Every verse in the song is directed against a police officer who pulls one of the rappers over in Los Angeles. The song starts with a policeman that gives a racist reasoning for his actions: “There they go over there! Aw man, shit! I gotta get up off my ass and go chase these cholo muthafuckas. I hate those fuckin’ Mexicans.” Then after each rapper has spitted his verse, there is a dispute with the police. The heated discussion with Kid Frost is going on while the rapper thinks that “Mr. Officer, you know where you can stick it? / I say this to myself, I let him do his thing / Or he might beat me down just like he beat down Rodney King.” Then it is MC Eiht’s turn to be pulled aside, with the police yelling that he should: “Pull your ass over and get on the sidewalk, lock hands and feet. You know the routine nigga. Yeah, nigga you rolling down Alondra like you own this muthafucka. Where’s the sack at, muthafucka?” The songs make it clear that MC Eiht has nothing on him. Finally, it is A.L.T.’s turn to be pulled over, which results in the following verbal exchange:

Police: "Hey, Honcho. Get your taco-eating ass out of the car. What's your fucking name?"

A.L.T.: "I'm ALT, but what the fuck did I do?"

Police: "Get your fucking ass over there on the curb. What's the bitch's name?"

A.L.T. "Hey, man, don't call my old lady a bitch."

The song ends with the police radio calling in all "units code 461. 24 Hollywood Boulevard. Suspects in custody." The purpose of the song is difficult to miss. In the greater area of Los Angeles, blacks and Latinos are victims of the same racial profiling and the same excessive use of police force. The song is also part of what would eventually be a long history of interethnic coalitions in new protest music. Most of the examples that have been highlighted in this thesis so far have taken place in California, but young people of color everywhere in the United States began to tell tales about their local situations in rhymes and beats that were heavily inspired by African American culture, and overlooked by African American tastemakers.

20 years later non-African American artists are still using the same blueprint. The 2008-song "Lick Shots", with Latin American MCs Immortal Technique and Chino XL and the African American artist Crooked I, is similar to the collaboration on "I Got Pulled Over". The song is even more lyrical aggressive towards the current police corps, with Chino XL for instance rapping that "Cop murdered by the certain burner turned in the back of his sternum / He flirted with pullin' me over for bein' brown, I bust / Now he in the back of the truck with Don Imus." The song is yet another example of artistry that comes as a reaction to what has been labeled as the "white power structure." This aspect can be seen even better in "Adios Uncle Tom" (2008), in which Immortal Technique along with African American M.C. Poison Pen combines samples from *Seinfeld*-star Michael Richards' famous angry outburst against African Americans with recordings of several racial rants against Mexicans and Muslims. This is done in order to criticize colored people that cooperate with the white power structure.

The same form of protests against violent police conduct is seen in the music of countless non-African American hip-hop artists. Das Racist ("Chicken and Meat," 2010), Himanshu Suri ("New York City Cops," 2012), Joell Ortiz ("Modern Day Slavery," 2007), Psycho Realm ("Lost Cities," 1997), Rebel Diaz ("Never a Prisoner," 2011), and Zack de La Rocha's vocals in Rage Against the Machine's "Killing in the Name" (1992), are just a few examples. These artists are everything from Indian American to Puerto Rican, but Chicano rappers have particularly used rap music to criticize aspects of inner-city life. This is especially true, as professor of sociology Pancho McFarland concludes, for aspects that

concerns question of violence and xenophobia (McFarland, 2006: 176). McFarland highlights some of the lyrics from the Psycho Realm song “Order Through Chaos” (1999) in order to illustrate how it is the urban poets that really use the public sphere to discuss the distresses caused by globalization and the illegitimate violence in the cities (McFarland, 2006: 179).

They keep order by making street corners gang borders/ Beating down King and
setting the theme for riot starters / Cop quarters can’t maintain the disorder / So
they call the National Guard to come strike harder / Rolling deep headed for
Florence and Normandy where all you see / Buildings on fire chaos on Roman
streets / Hope is cheap sold by the local thief relief from the common grief /
Served on a platter shatter your smallest dreams / Pig chiefs are referees on
gladiator fields / We’re too busy dodging the sword truth stays unrevealed /
Sealed all filled in the federal cabinets / Classified order through chaos for world
inhabitants (Psycho Realm, 1999: “Order Through Chaos”).

The question is if all this really means anything. What is the power of culture? Rhyming “they keep order by making street corners gang borders” is a clever poetical take on the Los Angeles Police Department’s practices of exacerbating neighborhood tensions, but does it achieve anything? What can really be accomplished by artistic protests against alleged police practices? First of all, one can conclude that these songs reach large audiences, and artists that reach a large public are highly influential. Secondly, considering that their artistries are largely based on personal storytelling, they are able to tell tales of their inner-city neighborhoods that are otherwise mainly neglected by mainstream media. By assimilating into hip-hop culture, non-African Americans have in other words been able to use what has been called the “CNN for marginalized young people” (Riley URL 2012).

Hip-hop Activism as Resistance

Secondly, hip-hop artistry has slowly developed into hip-hop activism. Although there are lots of examples of politically engaged artists, hip-hop’s political impact is perhaps best confirmed by the many new political organizations that have evolved out of hip-hop environments (Kitwana, 2012: 451). These organizations are often multiracial and based on interethnic requirements. Hip-hop activism has been, as McFarland writes,

Successful in creating an inclusive identity, “people of color,” that has the power to unite people of various ethnic (...) groups for the purpose of challenging environmental racism at the regional or national level. However (...) the “people of color” identity does not preclude the use of one’s own particular racial, ethnic or other identity; one need not lose oneself in order to become part of a multi-racial alliance (McFarland, 2006: 183-184).

Hip-hop activism has largely moved beyond the limits of racially restricted protests, but it has done so without removing the concepts of racial and ethnic identities. This has for example been seen in the Bay Area, where Latinos, blacks and Native Americans protested the sweeping power given to the police by California Proposition 21. These protests were claiming protection from the police on both an inclusive “people of color”-identity as well as on different ethnical restricted identities (Arnold, 2006: 82) (Martinez URL 2000). The same type of broad mobilization was seen in several of the protests and rallies that followed the murder of Trayvon Martin. In Seattle the organization Hip Hop Occupies to Decolonize (URL 2012) arranged rallies following this killing. They argued against both the specific racism towards African Americans, as well as the general high level of bigotry in society. One of their invitations for instance reads, “Trayvon Martin was murdered simply because of society placed stereotypes. I know everyone regardless of race has been stereotyped negatively in some way. Let’s all come together and say enough is enough” (Druha Seattle URL 2012).⁵² The example from Seattle is far from alone. All over the United States people protested on the basis of a new racial paradigm that has been transparent in hip-hop culture for several decades now.

Some of the studies done on segmented assimilation function within the worldview that a racist culture must and will be handed down from one generation to the next (Kitwana, 2005: 132-133). However, the time of upheaval that has already been apparent in hip-hop culture for a long time is also increasingly applying to the mainstream society. This is seen in movements such as the reactions to Prop 21 and to the murder of Trayvon Martin. The explanations for this alteration are largely found in hip-hop culture.

There are substantial evidences, as Robin D.G. Kelley writes, that there is a racially biased structure of the criminal-justice system and that people of color are easier getting arrested and sentenced to jail time than their white counterparts (Kelley, 1996: 135). As long as these facts never penetrate the subsurface of mainstream media and American politics, then hip-hop remains one of the few public platforms for discussing and challenging these prevailing public policies (Kitwana, 2005: 165). A significant part of hip-hop is exactly its symbolic and ideological warfare with institutions, like the criminal justice system, that are perceived to oppress the racial, ethnical or economical “others” of the United States (Jaynes,

⁵² Many activists also linked the murder of Martin to the murder of Iraq American Shaima Al Awadi, in order to broaden the protests. See for instance The Hip Hop Democrat (URL 2012).

2004: 100-101) (Parris, 2008: 213). Whether we want to call hip-hop the “theater of the powerless,” like Tricia Rose, or the “CNN for young marginalized people,” like Jeff Chang, we should at least stop with the automatic assumptions that assimilation into the culture is a bad thing (Parris, 2008: 213) (Riley URL 2012). After all, it seems better to join a culture that provides political and social mobilizations against mobile and shifting enemies, as seen in the examples of this chapter, than to join a mainstream society that has proven to be, at best, indifferent to the problems of racism and the effects of new security policies.

Concluding Remarks on the Case in Point

Asian, Latin and Arab Americans assimilate into hip-hop culture because of its aesthetics of cool, but also because they seek a culture that can be used as a tool for social change. This development should not be discouraged, but rather be seen as positive political and cultural contributions to American democracy, civic society and the much-needed new racial politics. As a result of assimilation into African American urban culture, young people of color has managed to make their situation, their experiences, and their political views be at the core of some of the most popular, influential, and groundbreaking cultural productions over the last decades. One reason for this is that the freedom of expression inherent in hip-hop has been somewhat a universal language. As such, its relevancy to the struggles of new minority groups in their fight for their own identity and liberation from political, social, economic oppression is undeniable (Arnold, 2006: 83).

These new cultural innovators are also to begin with frequently polycultural. They live in “bi-cultural worlds, jumping back and forth between languages and traditions, whether first generation or fifth in this country” (del Barco, 1996: 68). They are consequently also making the inner-city cultures less racially restricted, and instead more vibrant and mobile. The histories of Wyclef Jean and B-Real were used in this chapter to illustrate how non-African Americans have assimilated with great success into hip-hop culture. Both have used African American culture to express a “colored identity”-based critique of the police, but they have also both used hip-hop to celebrate their ethnic cultures and political demands. This is for instance seen in the Fugees’ charity concert in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and in Cypress Hill’s celebration of Latino culture in “Latin Lingo” (1991). They have been able to do this because hip-hop activism has largely moved beyond the limits of racially restricted protests, without

removing the concepts of racial and ethnic identities (Kitwana, 2012: 457) (McFarland, 2006: 184-185).

These are some of the results of assimilation into African American urban culture that are most often mysteriously missing in theories on segmented assimilation. Ignoring these consequences contribute to an overly negative picture of intergroup relations between African Americans and other ethnic minorities, that again result in the marginalization of some of the richest forms of contemporary urban creative expression in the United States (Kasinitz, 2004: 286) (Rivera, 2003: x). The intention in this chapter has therefore been to question the segmented assimilation theory by illustrating several positive consequences of the cultural hybrids created in the interplay between African Americans and other ethnic minorities.

5 Conclusion

I stated in the introductory chapter that the purpose of this thesis is to consider hip-hop culture as an arena for the process of assimilation of contemporary immigrant groups. I believed then, as I believe now, that an examination of intergroup relations inside hip-hop can provide valuable contributions to the fields of ethnic and immigration studies. Whereas I have not advanced a universal theory, I have questioned the dogmatic approaches indulged in the conflict thesis and the segmented assimilation theory. While the conflict thesis says that discord characterizes interethnic relations in the United States, segmented assimilation theorists argue that some Americans with immigrant backgrounds assimilate into a culture that is dominated by negative values, and which weakens their chances of social and economic mobility. Together they paint an exceedingly negative picture of intergroup relations between African Americans and other minorities. It is fair to ask if conflict and discord should be such dominant characterizations of the relations between African Americans and other minorities of color. Just as it is fair to question if assimilation into African American urban cultures really is the same as downward assimilation. Even though we should not have a roseate view of the picture, the negative doctrines of these hypotheses feel overwhelming. My work has consequently centered on the following main question: Can the experiences and the history of hip-hop culture counterbalance the pessimistic descriptions that these major trends contain?

In order to answer this issue, I started by questioning the conflict thesis. I did this by looking at the high degree of contact between African and Latin Americans in New York City. The historical relationship between the two groups revealed several examples where Latin Americans by no means showed any all-embracing resistance against blackness or African Americans. These people, like Puerto Rican hip-hopper Charlie Chase, wanted instead to be looked upon and labeled as blacks. They saw themselves, both in racial and sociocultural terms, as someone close to African Americans. They even actively absorbed elements of this group's traditions, manner of speech and fashion styles.

Assimilation is a transition that depends on both the immigrant and the host society, and the second discovery in this chapter is that African Americans got into a position as guides and gatekeepers in hip-hop culture. The conflicting approaches to the existence of

Puerto Ricans in hip-hop tell us that African Americans is a group that has more power in the cultural areas shared and contended for by different ethnic minorities than what is usually suggested. With this background, the argument is that African Americans in hip-hop culture obtained authority and control in ways that resemble how Irish Americans once dominated aspects of urban life in parts of the United States.

In the next chapter, the focus is changed from the conflict thesis to the segmented assimilation theory. By analyzing the ways that the concepts of race and ethnicity are dealt with in hip-hop culture, I was able to question the theory's conception of racism as an unchangeable and fixed part of society. The many examples of Puerto Ricans in New York, Hmong Americans in Wisconsin, Mexican Americans in Los Angeles and Chinese Americans in Miami illustrate a varied mix of ethnic minorities that all relate to a set of ideas about race that are much more complex than the common bipolar American racial obsession. The explanation is that social constructions like blackness, whiteness and race have different contents in hip-hop culture. Hip-hop namely connects blackness with authenticity and whiteness with racial otherness, so non-whiteness is consequently being seen as attractive for the culture's participators and its audience. This is proven by all the minority youths that copy African American traits and who use arguments that stress geographical, cultural and mythological closeness to blackness. The career of Jin, one of the most successful Asian American rappers, illustrated particularly well this point.

It is obvious that a time of upheaval has been apparent in hip-hop for a long time. Although hip-hop reinforces stereotypes about race, as seen in how the culture's leading narrative combines hypermasculinity and black aesthetics, it also "equips us to upend old racial paradigms" (Kitwana, 2005: 162). Hip-hop has worked as an arena for asking the right questions about race, and for violating the rigid racial boundaries in the United States. But can this culture affect society on a larger scale? Alternatively, is racism really a stable, everlasting part of American society? These questions became largely the focus in the last main chapter.

The argument of this thesis has not only been that the segmented assimilation theory fails to see the potential of new racial politics, but also that the theory misjudges the mobility and richness of African American culture and neglects the positive contributions of black culture and traditions to society. Acknowledged scholars like Mary Waters and Milton Vickerman have convincingly argued that even West Indian immigrants risk negative consequences by assimilating into African American culture (Kasinitz, 2004: 285) (Fulwood

III URL 1995). Although my purpose has never been, as stated in the beginning of the thesis, to dismiss the segmented assimilation theory entirely, I have asked if the theoretical model underestimates the vitality of African American cultures. Chapter 4 searched for positive aspects for those assimilated into hip-hop culture. That was a rather easy task to accomplish. Political power, youth mobilization, self-empowerment and mass media representation are just some of the keywords that came up under the examination for the positive sides of assimilation into hip-hop culture.

Segmented assimilation theorists also overestimate the level of opportunities for colored minorities in the United States. This thesis has consequently not only argued that there can be positive consequences of assimilation into hip-hop because of the cultures strength, but also because mainstream society fails to provide just opportunities, physical security and jobs with adequate wages. A great number of first- and second-generation Americans see hip-hop culture as an alternative to incorporation into a hostile society. The last part of the thesis illustrated for instance how the Haitian immigrant Wyclef Jean came to identify with African Americans by going through a period of habitual harassment from the police. Jean's story is special in that he ended up by being a superstar and multimillionaire, but otherwise it is the typical tale of contemporary immigrant experiences. Young people of color are using African American traditions, styles and cultures in order to speak their knowledge and display their lives.

In the song "Been Through the Storm" (2006), Busta Rhymes (born Trevor Smith Jr.), the descendant of two Jamaican immigrants, tells his own story of assimilation. It is a tale of criminality as a result of materialism and other supposed aspects of American "ghetto" life, but it is also the story of criminality as a result of vast economic inequality and Reaganomics. While he is admitting that he "ran away from home / doin' different wild shit, just to put a pair of Filas on, Adidas on", he is also underlying that "on the other hand, mommy was the type to work two jobs / never enough money, that's why I got your whole crew robbed." Busta Rhymes illustrates with his rhymes that incorporation into mainstream society is not as positive as it is sometimes portrayed. Busta Rhymes, Wyclef Jean, and all the other artists and activists that have been put forward in this thesis looked up to African Americans as role models in both the fight against racism and the struggle for greater social mobility for colored people.

Hip-hop culture has challenged the rigid racial ideas in the United States. While hip-hop has invoked blackness and other racialized conceptions, the culture has also deliberately, forcefully, repeatedly and threateningly violated the rigid lines between races when it comes to behaviors, attitudes and politics (Neal, 2012b: 71). Besides, the culture's popularity has made non-blacks more comfortable around black people and more open towards African American culture. However, much of the culture's power is really based on the fact that most young people who identify themselves with hip-hop, unlike other music genres, identify with more than music (Kitwana, 2005: xii & 15). As Kitwana writes:

Although bebop, the jazz subculture, was also associated with a cultural lifestyle, that lifestyle never ventured far beyond jazz aficionados. Hip-hop's emergence in a global information age is a major variable that sets it apart, vastly increasing its capacity to reach beyond anything the world has ever seen (Kitwana, 2005: xii).

Consequently, we should stop analyzing hip-hop as simply pop music. If we study it as pop music, we will mostly find a small collection of artists that recycle largely the same narratives of life. However brilliant or dreadful these artists may be, it is only a small part of hip-hop. As a culture, hip-hop has its own value system, its own ideas of race, and its own spiritual, political and economic imperatives (Kitwana, 2005: 166). Obviously, hip-hop should be analyzed as a phenomenon that is much more than just pop music.

The hip-hop community is now more multiracial than ever, and it continues to build interethnic alliances in its activism (McFarland, 2006: 187). This is seen in the movements created after California Proposition 21 and the murder of Trayvon Martin. With the culture's increased focus on a transracial class-consciousness and a connected global ideology, hip-hop continues to be a welcomed space for multicultural connections and activism. A clear understanding of this interethnic engagement, which may seem superficial to those outside the culture, "affords us a unique lens for analyzing the evolution of ideas about race in America – changes that are manifesting themselves in a new generation" (Kitwana, 2005: xiv). I have illustrated some of the consequences of this cross-cultural engagement, precisely with the goal of giving a refreshing and much needed new point of view on assimilation and interethnic contact in the United States.

Concluding Remarks

As hip-hop gradually evolves out of the shadows of the old racial politics, we should ask ourselves if it could make blackness more inclusive. Young black males confronted both their parents and the civil rights generation, and the hostile white society. In return, they created a culture that rejected both assimilation into white mainstream America and the black post-civil rights model. Consequently, they created something new. The result was a culture that made blackness more liberating, but paradoxically enough also imprisoning. You could take the new portable blackness with you to the boardrooms or the universities, but hip-hop's almost surrealistic demands for authenticity resulted also in a blackness that was severely limited. However, the development of hip-hop has for the last year moved in the direction of less focus on race, and a broader definition of what it means to be black. Leading artists like Kanye West, Drake and J. Cole have invoked aspects of middleclass life into the center of rap music, and authors like Touré and Kitwana argue that the younger generation of African Americans is about to move away from the idea of a unified blackness, and into a new country where blackness could be anything. What is hip-hop's role in the ongoing development of the concept of blackness? This is an interesting topic for further discussions.

Another important topic lays in how the new ethnic minorities also confront both the white immigrant pluralist model and the African American post-civil rights model. Can they too create something entirely new? Can they through hip-hop or other urban cultures build something whose parameters are not yet defined (Kasinitz, 2004: 293)? Can they promote latinidad or asianess in hip-hop culture so that these markers of self-identity can be accepted in all parts of mainstream society? These are the questions about race that we should start asking ourselves. The answers to these issues are most likely to be found in the new cultures created by urban Americas' multi- and polycultural youths.

The answers however are only to be found if we stop analyzing hip-hop as simply pop music. This has been an attempt to explore an African American urban culture broader and with more nuances than one can usually find in American immigration and ethnicity studies. It is done with the hope that such an approach can tell us more about why non-African Americans assimilate into hip-hop culture. I believe that it is much needed in a field where the participators often write intensively about assimilation into African American urban culture, but only looks superficially at the actual culture. I hope that the thesis can be an inspiration for further use of hip-hop studies in academic works.

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